DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 712 JC 990 264

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TITLE Voices in the Classroom.
PUB DATE 1997-12-00
NOTE 286p.; Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New Mexico.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Doctoral Dissertations (041)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC12 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Cooperative Learning; Diversity (Student); Individualized Instruction; Language Acquisition; Learning Strategies; *Literacy; *Reading Skills; Self Esteem; *Student Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex interaction and individuality of students in a community college basic writing class. Students represented a diverse population in terms of age and ethnicity. The research makes use of informal and formal modes of writing in the classroom as a way to understand writing as both an individual activity and as a social process. There were two formal assignments administered on the topic of literacy: First, students described their personal histories with learning to read and write; second, students researched their community or family's attitudes toward reading and writing. Research reflects how writing in the classroom encouraged personal introspection and problem solving in a very immediate manner. Interpretation of the findings focuses on developing a more comprehensive understanding of the concepts of purpose, authority, and confidence, and aims to establish a better definition of writing. The study addresses: (1) how students remember and reflect on their personal histories with reading and writing; (2) the process experienced by teacher and students in writing classes serving diverse student populations; (3) how past and present experiences affect individuals' confidence; (4) how student writers perceive their writing processes, their readings, and their purpose; (5) the roles that gender and culture play in writing ability; and (6) what happens when a teacher works with students to encourage subjective awareness through writing. Contains more than 150 references. (Author/AS)

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VOICES IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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Ph.D.
Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies

December 1997

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my committee for their time, Don Zancanella for the creative way he worked with my interpretative process/my writing, Vera John-Steiner for her years of support and inspiration, Julia Hudson for starting me down the road of teaching, Meredith Machen for her confidence, my daughter Rebecca, Elito, Dylan, and Alyssa for the joy they bring me, Matthew for his commentary and his cooking, Nancy for saving the day, Karen and Michael for their help, my friends for being who they are, and, of course, my students, who make it all real.

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Abstract

This study explores the complex interaction and individuality of students in a community college basic writing class. Students represented a diverse population in terms of age and ethnicity. The study makes use of informal as well as formal modes of writing in the classroom as a way to understand writing as both an individual activity and as a social process. The two formal assignments were on the topic of literacy: first, students described their personal histories with learning to read and write; second, students researched their community or family's attitudes toward reading and writing. Journals and informal writings documented students' understanding of the writing process and perceptions of the classroom experience. The research reflects how writing in the classroom encouraged personal reflection and problem solving in a very immediate manner. Students interpreted and re-interpreted life experiences and were empowered to move outside limitations they had experienced. Research revealed the value of studying writing in the context of the classroom. Field notes, description of classroom experience, and large portions of students' writings contribute to the interpretation. Case histories are used to follow the experiences of particular students. The teacher/researcher reflects on her theoretical framework, referring to objectivist, subjectivist, transactional/ interactionist, feminist and sociocultural theories. As participant research, both teacher and students describe the effects of observation, dialogue, and reflection in

this classroom environment. Further interpretation of the findings focuses on developing a more comprehensive understanding of the concepts "purpose," "authority/confidence," and the question "What is writing?" This research was designed so that it can be replicated as research or as curriculum and may be considered action research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract v

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
    Questions, Purpose, Rationale 4

Chapter 2: Background of the Situation 6
    Basic Writing Courses 6
    Historical Look at the Content of Composition Courses 12
        Objective Theories of Composition 12
        Subjective Theories of Composition 13
        Transactional Theories of Composition 14
    Historical Look at Research on the Process of Writing 18
        Experimentalist Theories 19
        Cognitive Theories 20
        Socio-Cognitive Theories 21
    Practitioner Research 25
    Summary/This Research 27

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods 35
    Participant Observation in Classroom Research 35
    Collaborative-Action Research 38
    Methods of This Research 40
        Collecting the Data 40
        Choice of Participants 42
        Interpretation 45

Challenges/Issues 49
Ethics 50
Reliability 51
Internal Validity 52
External Validity 52

Chapter 4: Findings54
Section 1: Writings About Learning to Read and Write 54
Background/Theory 54
Narrative Expository Writing 56
Information About Students' Past Experiences 58
Classroom Context of the Assignments 59
Reflective/Interpretative Processes 60
Assignment 1 62
The Semester Begins 62
A Look at the First In-Class Free-Write 62
Back to the Classroom 66
A Look at the Draft of Paper #1 68
References to Culture 72
References to Family 73
References to School and Learning Modes 78
References to the Meaningfulness of Reading and Writing 81
The Meaningfulness of Reading 81
The Meaningfulness of Writing 84
An Observation about Confidence and Authority 89
Preparing the Final Draft of Paper #1 93
A Look at the Final Draft on Paper #1 95
Understanding Expectations of Audience and Form 96
Effects of Small-Group and Classroom Discussions 102
Theme I: Readings Have Hidden Meanings 103
Theme II: Writing Can Be Healing 105
Encouragement of Honest Writing 107
How Do Students Decide What to Include in the Final Paper? 113
Concluding Comments 120

Section 2: Writings About Family/Community Attitudes About Reading and Writing 127
Background/Theory 127
Assignment 2 135
Preparing for Paper #2 136
Looking at Paper #2 139
Carmela 144
Angela 146
What Happened in Class With Angela's Paper 147
John 154
Thomas 159
Adela 164
Lucas 166
Isabella and Sally 168
Susan 173
Lynne 174
Concluding Comments 177

Section 3: Writings About Writing and Reading in This Class 187
Background/Theory 187
Writings about Reading and Writing 191
Susan 195
Adela 197
John 203
Mark 206
Elito 210
Sally 216
Isabella 218
Carmela 222
Concluding Comments 228

Section 4: Writings About the Classroom 233
Background/Theory 233
Entering the Community: Classroom Interaction and Learning 239
Reading in the Classroom Community: Working with Multiple Interpretations 246
Classroom Interaction: Emotional as Well as Rational 252

Classroom Interaction: Personal Challenges in Situations of Diversity 265
Concluding Comments 277

Chapter 5: Conclusion 280
Responses to Initial Research Questions 282
Purpose 286
Authority and Self-Confidence 292
Writing 299
Directions for Further Research 304

Works Cited 305

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

When a basic writing teacher walks into a community college classroom, she is always questioning: What should I be teaching? How should I be teaching in this situation? The answers emerge from an understanding of the purposes of basic writing courses and how people learn to use reading and writing for varied purposes, personal as well as academic and professional. The answers to these questions are always evolving, shifting to meet the needs of each classroom situation.

The teaching of writing has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, moving from product concerns to a greater awareness of the processes as well as the social and cultural contexts. We have a vocabulary for the evaluation of traditional academic writing: coherence, unity, organization, supporting facts, logic, style, correct grammar and punctuation, etc. And the concept of process gives us a vocabulary for describing the activities involved: prewriting (brainstorming, free-writing, listing, clustering), drafting, revising, and editing. However, these vocabularies may not address the communication of complex, subtle concepts such as purpose and authority in writing or explain the environment that supports using language for creative problem solving.

Appreciation for diversity has led teachers into the need to understand varied cognitive and communicative styles and skills. We need to acknowledge that communication is a product of cultural and social experience and that communication between different discourse communities is complex. Recognizing the diversity of cultural and personal experience, we must develop ways of talking and writing that allow both teachers and students to explore and describe the learning taking place and to understand the communication that is needed.

With this interest in understanding the writing process, teachers and researchers have a particular concern with students who have been labeled "basic writers." These are students who enter college without the traditionally expected abilities–analytical and synthetic thinking as well as grammar, punctuation and organizational skills. There has always been hesitation about categorizing/labeling this diverse group of students (Shaugnessy 1976). We recognize that "remediation" is a product of particular perceptions and beliefs about literacy and learning and that this labeling may affect attitudes toward these students. In fact, recent debates (Sheridan-Rabideau, Brossell 1995; Bartholomae 1993; Hull, Rose, Fraser, Castellano 1991) focus on the effects of this labeling on institutions, faculty, and students. Some researchers believe that labeling recognizes the special needs of these students and the importance of understanding how they can meet the challenges of college. David Bartholomae, a key researcher in the history of this field, believes that as professionals we must question the basis and the effects of this labeling. He writes that labeling individuals as basic writers is a way not to hear what these writers are saying, a way to not value their perceptions. The purpose of this study is to hear what these students say/write about their experiences with reading and writing and to recognize their abilities to use reading and writing to understand their histories and to grow and learn.

One problem in current composition research is the lack of information about these basic writers' experiences, that particular mixture of feelings and cognition that occurs in the writing classroom: how instructors and students experience each other and how students experience writing. What happens when individuals participate in institutions, interact with new groups of people? How do these experiences affect their sense of what they have to say, their voice? How do gender and culture play into the situation? Where in these situations does meaningful learning occur? Historically, texts, teachers, and institutions have had such authority that students have not expressed their feelings or reactions to the experience until years later.

This interpretive research seeks to represent a community college basic writing classroom, reflecting/recognizing the complex interaction and individuality in the learning environment. The data represent both the teacher/researcher's interpretations and the students' perceptions of the classroom. The focus of the interpretation is on the two writing assignments in which students described their histories with reading and writing and their family/community's attitudes toward reading and writing. Thus, the research documents students' perceptions of past experiences learning to read and write as well as their present experiences in the class being studied. The research contains formal and informal writing, creating an ongoing dialogue about the purposes of writing and the factors affecting individual experiences with writing. My research is meant to speak to other teacher/researchers who validate their research methodology from a practitioner's position as well as from a theorist's position.

Questions, Purpose, Rationale

My research questions address what happens in the basic writing class:

> How do students remember and reflect on their personal histories with reading and writing?
>
> What are students and the teacher experiencing in writing classes serving diverse student populations?
>
> How do these experiences (past and present) affect individuals' confidence?
>
> How do student writers perceive their writing processes, their readers, their purpose?
>
> What roles do gender and culture play?
>
> What happens when a teacher works with students to encourage subjective awareness and problematizing of the learning experience by writing about it?

The purpose of this research is twofold: 1) to bring research into practice; and 2) to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of composition. Classroom research has been praised for its contributions "traditions, practices, and beliefs" (North 22). Fieldwork research, through its fine-tuned observation, its dialogue with participants, and its reflexiveness, "helps researchers and teachers to make the familiar strange. . . .The commonplace becomes problematic. What is happening can become visible, and it can be documented systematically" (Erickson 121). Because this research involves both the teacher and students in its process, both may experience the effects of observation, dialogue, and reflection in the classroom. Collecting data was not done by an outsider to the class, but by participants. The effects of the research are a part of the data. The data and interpretation contribute to the body of knowledge in composition through the documentation of the concrete details of a particular situation. These descriptions then provide points of comparison for other teachers and researchers. Other teachers are able to compare classrooms where research is a part of instruction as well as comparing other aspects of the classroom.

Because this research involves students' time and participation, research questions were critical to the development of their writing as well as central to the instructor/researcher's questions. Such research is based on assumptions of socially constructed knowledge which are basic to current thinking in both social science research and composition theory (Le Compte and Preissle 1993; Ray 1993; Berlin 1992; Brandt 1992). Research has suggested that students' participation in research encourages metacognitive awareness of learning (Holmsten 1987). Through human interaction we develop the meaning of a situation and the concepts we use to function within the situation. Through writing and classroom discussion (interaction/dialogue), students learn about themselves and others. The stated purpose of the course studied was to develop students' academic/professional writing. Learning academic discourse involves communication built on an understanding of self, others, and expectations. Thus, the methodology in this research brings together practice and theory.

CHAPTER 2

Background of the Situation

History provides some background for understanding our questions–what do we teach in the basic writing course, and how do individuals learn to write? As teacher research, this research is placed in a history of knowledge making in composition, a history of rhetoric, and writing research. History enables us to better understand where expectations and influences originate, and to explore how institutional and personal values about content and process have developed. The broad theoretical discussion occurs in this chapter. More specific theoretical conversations are woven throughout the four sections of Chapter Four: Findings.

Schools of thinking in composition fit generally into two categories: 1) rhetorical theories–what should be taught in writing courses; and 2) research theories–how people write and the learning situations of writing instruction. The basic writing class has a specific place in this history of composition, and practitioner research has a particular role in research. This chapter will focus on the following: 1) basic writing courses; 2) content of composition courses; 3) process of writing; 4) practitioner research; and 5) summary/ the place of this research.

Basic Writing Courses

Basic writing courses share many of the same issues as composition courses, but include an understanding of who basic writers are and what experience, or lack of experience, they may bring to the classroom. The term "basic writer" is the frequently used term coined by Mina Shaugnessy in her seminal work, Errors and Expectations (1977). She describes the large population of students entering post-secondary educational institutions who are not prepared for freshman composition courses.

Shaunessy shifted thinking from a deficit model, which considered these students linguistically and psychologically deficient, to a model that recognized that these students lack experience writing in a variety of roles or discourse modes. Therefore, they have difficulty with academic/professional writing. Research and discussion of the basic writer have focused on understanding the social and cultural experiences these individuals bring to the classroom as well as the feelings and attitudes that affect communication and cognition (Bartholomae, Bizzell, DiPardo, Flower, Perl, Rose, Shaunessy). Bartholomae expresses the problems created by labeling these students when expectations are then limited by instructors and administration (1987). Also, the boundaries that set these students apart are fuzzy, and as individuals these students often do not fit the generalizations or the theories. Although the term "basic writer" is problematic, its use has prompted an understanding of the educational needs of many students and challenged our assumptions about reading and writing.

Basic writing is generally characterized as having more errors than normally expected in terms of grammar, punctuation, syntax, and spelling; not using "appropriate" (abstract) vocabulary; and lacking the necessary level of evaluation, synthesis, and application (Bartholomae 1987; Rose 1987). Problems with the mechanics of writing need to be looked at in terms of their logic as well as the way they interfere with content and process. Shaugnessy (1977) researched errors in grammar, spelling, syntax, vocabulary, handwriting, and structural concerns for patterns. Emphasizing that the basic writer is just learning, she demonstrates the logic of errors and discusses the need for careful explanation and interpretation of the patterns of errors. Sondra Perl used written texts, composing tapes, and interviews to collect information on the writing processes of unskilled college-level writers (1980). Noting that unskilled writers lack understanding of the rules of written language, she found that their editing usually failed to correct errors. She noted that a major problem of the inexperienced writer is the interference of an editing mode. These writers, she observed, had an over-concern with correct form, which interrupted the flow of composition and inhibited the development of ideas. Along the same lines, John Hayes and Linda Flower observed that better writers can put aside immediate editing in their concern with higher-level goals (1981). More recently, researchers have focused on the problems created by an over-emphasis on the mechanics of writing (Bartholomae 1987; Rose 1987). If students focus on writing as a "cosmetic" process, writing loses its potential as a cognitive tool of discovery and a way of developing meaning.

Discussion concerning cognitive aspects of basic writing, such as the ability to generalize, synthesize, and evaluate information, takes into consideration students' experience and the social/cultural contexts of writing situations. Considerable research has been done to look at language and schooling. The basic writer (the student in a freshman composition course, for example) is often entering a new community with new expectations. The language of the academic situation is more abstract than the student generally uses; particulars are discussed in terms of generalizations and abstractions. The school experience involves using language in different ways, and each level of education puts particular demands on the cognitive growth of the individual. Therefore, although the ability to use abstract language and to explain hierarchical structures of organization are often assumptions of expository writing, teachers cannot assume that inexperienced writers have developed these abilities (Bartholomae 1987). Vygotsky theorizes that the process of writing itself affects communicative and cognitive development (1978). Thus, understanding of the relationship between writing and cognition is critical to working with basic writers.

Bartholomae describes the basic writer's situation as the "social, historical struggle of the individual writer to locate self and work within the privileged discourse of a closed community" (1987, 69). He focuses on the concept of self and attitudes toward the subject, and the process of writing that plays into the cognitive functions of using language in new ways (91). Bartholomae also attempts to understand students' perceptions of academic discourse and how this affects writing. He writes:

> Basic writers, because they equate thought with order, profundity with maxims, often look for the means of reducing a subject to its simplest or most obvious terms. Ambiguity, contradiction, uncertainty–those qualities that are most attractive to academics–are simply "wrong" in the minds of students whose primary goal is to produce controlled and safe essays (1987, 92).

Issues related to the communicative expectations of academic writing need to be understood in terms of social and cultural factors. We need to look at the assumptions that underlie these forms of academic and professional writing. Researchers have looked at discourse communities to understand educational challenges (Tannen 1984, 1982; Heath 1983). For example, Deborah Tannen's work on discourse analysis reflects the fact that cultural groups have specific communicative styles, and coherence is relative to the group (Tannen 1984, 1982). In academic situations, students are often being asked to understand the communication rules of new communities. This transition may be easier for members of some cultural groups than for others. The research done by Gumperz, Kalman, and O'Connor on cultural diversity shows that some speakers' oral styles are more easily translated into the expository mode than are those of others (1984).

These discussions of learning and cultural contexts are part of the debates around the content and process of basic writing courses. Educators working with basic writers are divided about methods of introducing/working with academic discourse. Mike Rose has criticized basic writing courses that attempt to be "relevant and accessible" because what he calls simple and personal topics (narration and description) do not challenge the students to develop higher-level, critical thinking skills (1987). Overly simplified topics and a concentration on errors create a reductionistic model of composing, limiting possibilities for discovering, connecting, and playing with ideas. Rose believes students should be immersed immediately in academic topics and forms of writing. Bartholomae agrees with Rose's criticism of some basic writing classes, but he initiates students into new ways of thinking and writing by assigning students to write about their personal experiences before asking them to make generalizations and read academic texts (1987). Using classmates' experiences and writing, students are asked to categorize, generalize, problem solve, and make arguments about human experience. He believes that students need to see themselves in the world in a way that enables them to turn "their experience into 'subject matter' and to define a relationship with the subject that makes creative thinking possible" (91). Teacher/researcher Lois Rubin finds Bartholomae's strategies not only effective in introducing academic thinking and writing, but more sensitive to students (1992).

Peter Elbow has questioned the content of freshman composition in terms of its over-emphasis on academic discourse (1991). He expresses the importance and need for non-academic writing in education and also looks at the diversity of academic discourse to raise questions about what is "basic" to academic discourse. He believes that writers should be able to "render" as well as analyze experience and that it is a disservice to students not to include narrative and description in our curricula. He also discusses the need to "relinquish control over language" in order to use it for discovery and deconstruction (1991, 46). Like Vygotsky, whose theories look at the interaction between the development of thinking and writing, Elbow's interest in how written language and thinking relate are especially important to basic writing teachers. Remembering that the line between basic writers and freshman composition students is blurred, we need to look at the history of composition courses to clarify the purposes of content.

Historical Look at the Content of Composition Courses

The history of composition theory is relevant in addressing the instructor's concern about what should be taught in a writing course. Historical perspectives provide the understanding and background to make critical personal choices, rather than accepting what is often presented as "the way composition is taught." Theories of composition are shaped by epistemology, history, economics, and the institutions in which teachers work. Rhetorical approaches to the teaching of writing have been classified into three major schools by those who have looked at the history of composition: 1) objective theories; 2) subjective theories; and 3) transactional theories (Berlin 1987; North 1987; Crowley 1990).

Objective Theories of Composition

Traditional rhetoric instruction is the objectivist system of writing which evolved out of the nineteenth century, emphasizing the scientific and technological. The objective theories of rhetoric locate reality in the external world, in the material objects of experience. They are based on a positivistic epistemology in which language is the sign system recording what exists. Truth is determined through inductive methods, that is, collecting sense data and arriving at generalizations. Truth is believed to exist prior to language, and truths are arrived at through correct methods of investigation.

Evolving from this tradition, current-traditional rhetoric instruction involves teaching students to describe, transcribe, and learn rules of form (Berlin 1987; Crowley 1990). Historically, this system was designed to serve the purposes of a rapidly growing economy, preparing a managerial class. We should note that Warner Taylor in the late 1920s observed the separation of classes in rhetorical approaches to the teaching of writing: middle-class colleges emphasized the current traditional rhetoric, while upper-class colleges emphasized a more liberal culture, opposed to specialization (Berlin 1987).

Sharon Crowley notes that in current-traditional rhetoric, invention has been overshadowed by focus on arrangement and style (1990). Historically, invention was the study of all possible means of argument and proof, and was particularly sensitive to shaping content for a specific audience. Current-traditional rhetoric, then, created the idea of the authorial mind, shifting the focus to the individual writer rather than the community/reader. This shift from audience to author changed instructional focus to a concern with the shape of the text, standard forms, rather than with the communicative quality of the text. This shift in rhetorical focus further creates the assumption of a standard reader, failing to acknowledge the diversity of citizenry.

Subjective Theories of Composition

According to Berlin, the subjective theories of rhetoric locate truth within the individual or within a realm that is accessible only through the individual's apprehension, apart from the verifiable sensory world (1987). This school has its roots in Platonic thinking and the transcendental movement of Emerson and Thoreau, and has been influenced by Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and philosophical idealism. In subjective rhetoric, truth cannot be taught, and writing is considered an art. The focus of writing education is the environment in which it takes place. It should encourage expression of private versions of experience, metaphorical thinking, journal writing, and aesthetic experience with language. Group response is used to develop the aesthetic sense. Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, and Donald Murray are considered proponents of subjective rhetoric.

Ann Berthoff argues that subjective rhetoric is self-indulgent, cathartic, ineffectual emoting (Berlin 1992; Berthoff 1991). In contrast, Elbow believes that "the use of language to interact with self and others develops self-understanding and makes for a better social order" (Berlin 1992).

Transactional Theories of Composition

The transactional school of rhetoric views writing instruction as the development of language as a tool for the "generation of knowledge" as well as the transmission of knowledge (Berlin 1992). The social-epistemic school of rhetoric is the dominant voice of transactional rhetoric. In this system knowledge is a dialectic, involving the interaction of opposing positions. Knowledge is created in communities through the use of language. Most members of this school profess post-modern or post-structuralist positions, in which "truth" does not exist outside language (Shor 1980; Crowley 1990; Berlin 1992). For many theorists in this field, rhetoric is a political act involving dialectical interaction engaging the world; the writer with language is the agent of mediation and change. Writing instruction for this school centers on helping students understand political and power situations and how to use language to affect the world (Berlin 1992; Shor 1980).

The limitations of this school of rhetorical thinking may be its political agenda and its tendency to oversimplify the process of community dialogue. Proponents of the social-epistemic school present curricula, encouraging students to be aware of political aspects of language (Shor 1980; Berlin 1992). One part of increasing students' awareness of interpretive processes is the study of hermeneutics. In his discussion of philosophical hermeneutics, Timothy Crusius explains the complex nature of prejudices and personal processes of interpretation (1992). Working with varied interpretations of the world develops critical thinking and is an important goal of rhetoric; however, educators need to recognize the psychological dimensions of these activities and processes.

The study of philosophy is critical in revealing our assumptions and attitudes, and in determining our goals and purposes in composition. Many researchers cross categories and give philosophical perspectives (Bizzell 1990; Crowley 1990; Berlin 1992), and philosophers from other fields, such as Thomas Kuhn (1971), provide reflection on the behaviors of academic communities, emphasizing the underlying assumptions of different schools of knowledge. Philosophical thinking has an important place as the "cultural self-consciousness" (North 1987) of the field, questioning what is taught in writing courses.

One philosophical school of thinking about composition uses current literary theory to provide scholarly perspectives on language, the human experience, and the teaching of writing (Donahue and Quandahl 1989; Morton and Mas'ud Zavarazdeh 1991; Harkin and Schlib 1991; Berlin 1992). These thinkers use the writings of Marx, Freud, Foucault, Derrida, and Bakhtin to work toward a philosophical understanding of language and how this relates to what should be taught in writing courses. These writers are less concerned with rules, conventions, and models in the classroom and more concerned with the intellectual struggle in the language environment. Similar to the social-epistemic rhetorical school, this group has a strong political agenda. They believe the purpose of composition is to help students understand power and oppression as they are reflected through discourse communities. This group believes that rhetoric should be a source of critical insight and a reflection on the struggle to understand gender, social, and cultural differences.

Feminist criticism also raises philosophical questions about the content of the writing course, questioning its emphasis on form. Lynn Worsham questions strategies of instruction that perpetuate tradition ways of authority and knowing (1991). Recognizing that what moves writing is "untranslatable, unrepresentable," she laughs at the seriousness of form and emphasizes the role of writing to play with "difference." Worsham writes that "our deepest relation to language and to the world is not epistemic but emotional and material" (1991, 92). Susan Jarratt argues that conventional academic discourse is the "product of hierarchical, male-dominated systems of logic and learning that is oppressive to women" (1991, 106). Feminist perspectives ask that the content of writing courses not emphasize focus and structure, but work at exploration of experience through language. The nature of the content should openly acknowledge differences of gender, race, and class. Jarratt believes that we need situations in which conflict does arise and that we need "more than the ideal of the harmonious, nurturing composition class in our repertory of teaching practices to deal with these problems" (1991, 113). In other words, the content of composition courses needs to recognize and work with the diversity of our communities and the diversity of ways of knowing.

While philosophy and criticism open doorways in our thinking, the contemporary philosophy of post-structural/anti-foundationalism also recognizes its own boundaries. Acknowledging the limitations of logical thinking and our ability to know "truth," writers from the school of philosophical hermeneutics move us beyond deconstruction and provide a sense of direction: the study of interpretation (Crusius 1992). Philosophical hermeneutics suggests the value of looking at and working with writing as a reflection of interpretation, rather than as a representation of truth.

Rhetoric is based on processes of interpretation, and philosophical hermeneutics studies interpretation. Philosophical hermeneutics also establishes an understanding of and respect for difference. Communicative writing assumes that we become self-reflective, aware of the factors that create our interpretations of the world, and aware of others and their interpretations of the world. Rhetoric should involve and encourage students to take the process deeper and use writing to self-reflect on their attitudes and prejudices as a part of developing critical thinking.

This brief look at the history of rhetorical and philosophical schools in composition provides insight into some of the epistemological, historical, and political issues affecting the content of writing courses. Current concern with interpretation and writing as a process of creating meaning, as well as the transcription of information and instruction of form, necessitates recognition of the complexity of human experience and cognition. Caroline Eckhardt and David Stewart make a distinction between approach through technique and approach through purpose (1979). They hold that a technique approach appeals to the human need to use tools, strategy, and technology. They believe, however, that preoccupation with technique ignores the more basic human need to seek meaning and purpose. Sondra Perl asserts that adult classrooms have the potential to use writing, texts, and conversation to enable individuals to "compose not only texts, but also themselves" (1994, 427).

This history of composition leads into the obvious need for an understanding of the processes involved in thinking, communicating, and writing. Here we move to the second area of questioning: How do basic writers learn to read and write, meeting academic expectations and personal needs?

Historical Look at Research on the Process of Writing

During the 1970s, composition theory took a major turn that some have described as a revolution (Hairston 1982; Young 1978). The shift was from an emphasis on the composed product to the composing process itself, stressing the need for further understanding of the prewriting stage, and the analytical and synthetic skills involved in academic writing. Emig (1969), Graves (1984), and Murray (1980) took big steps in moving toward understanding process. Concern with the process of writing contributes to instructors' understanding of how to teach writing. Research on the writing process provides insight into how people write, how people learn to write, the relationship between writing and cognition, and what happens in the writing classroom/educational institutions.

Experimentalist Theories

While some forms of process overlap categories, it may be helpful to use North's term "experimental research" (141) to decribe the work of those composition researchers whose concern is to isolate discrete aspects of the writing process, emphasizing the individual's cognitive or socio-cognitive experience. The experimentalists are probably the oldest school of process research and the most numerous, although they seem to be losing ground (North 1987). These researchers attempt to emulate the physical sciences, using experimentation to study grammar and conceptual issues. Characteristics of this type of formal inquiry are approaching the problem through individual minds, attempting to generalize, and discussing validity and replicability. Research design is a major focus. This research is questioned because it attempts to generalize from individual cases and because it speaks more to other researchers than to teachers. Its practical benefit to teachers has been challenged (North 1987). The lengthy studies done on sentence combining left a skeptical perception of what these methods could contribute.

Linda Flower's and John Hayes' early work on composition and cognition is the most recognized model of this work (1981). Flower's and Hayes' work uses writing protocols as the major research method: as they write, individuals talk about the process they are going through. Their work has emphasized a rational model of goal setting, studying experienced writers in most cases. Flower's work has developed to recognize the importance of context on cognition, but she has continued to build her models on individual experience and to study primarily experienced writers (1991).

Cognitive Theories

Another area of composition research is concerned with the relationship between writing and cognition. The cognitive school grew out of the work of Jerome Bruner (1982), Jean Piaget (1958), and Vygotsky (1978). According to these researchers, the teacher guides the process of development as the individual arrives at knowledge by using language to interact with the world. Vygotsky's work has had a significant influence on this school because he opened up the concept of social interaction structuring individual cognition (1986, 1978). Individuals first use language to communicate in the world; these patterns then structure the use of language for thinking. He believed that language is central to the process of enculturation and the process of individuation. His theories of "Inner Speech" and the "Zone of Proximal Development" explore the way learners shift from their reliance upon others, upon dialogue, to increasing self-reliance. Courtney Cazden's work on discourse in the classroom builds on Vygotsky's theories (1988). Vera John-Steiner also has continued work with Vygotsky's ideas, looking at inner speech and private speech as forms of intra-speech, communication among aspects of self which are important in the creative process and the directing of mental life (1995, 1985).

Cognitive research also provides insight for the writing-to-learn movement. James Moffet has worked with the ideas of inner speech and "writing for self" in terms of its role in learning (1982). Like Moffet, Toby Fulwiler has made significant contributions to our understanding of the use of informal language to comprehend the relationship between writing and learning in specific college situations (1986). The role of writing experience in conceptualizing is critical in a process model of instruction because understanding the cognitive functions of written language supports using informal language to create meaning and encourage metacognition in the early stages of the creation of a more formal written product.

Another form of cognitive research is the case study. This involves close observation of the writing process in individuals and attempts to make connections with psychological theories of development. An example of this type of research is Emig's work with twelfth-grade writers, which looks at psychological development and writing (North 1987).

Socio-Cognitive Theories

Because some theory and research have focused on individuals and do not consider the context or social nature of writing, many composition researchers have shifted to a socio-cognitive model of writing. By moving the writing process into the realm of social science, researchers hope to gain understanding of the complexity of human cognition and psychology. As a whole, socio-cognitive theories have contributed to expanding the focus of composition research to the context of the classroom.

Researcher Deborah Brandt promotes a model that reflects the social and communicative aspects of writing (1992). Brandt's studies are conducted in the context of real writing situations rather than controlled situations, using methods of sociology to understand the communicative functions involved in writing. Her interest focuses on the social history and experiences writers carry into the writing situation.

From another perspective, Stuart Greene emphasizes the need to balance the focus on social context with a focus on individual cognition (1990). He believes that with the current focus on cognition within its social structure, the importance of the individual's process has been underemphasized; he encourages research that captures/reflects both individual cognition and social influences.

Perhaps addressing Greene's concern for a balanced approach, ethnographic research does focus on the individual in the learning situation. As a participant-observer, Robert Brooke takes a sociological and psychological perspective on individual behavior in the classroom (1987, 1988). He believes that writing becomes meaningful for individuals when it supports their attempts to be a certain kind of individual.

Other research that looks at the learning situation reflects political and institutional aspects of instruction, exploring issues of power affecting both teachers and students (Bizzell 1990; DiPardo 1992). Researchers seem to be in agreement that for many basic writers there is a clash between the home/community culture and the academic culture. Patricia Bizzell outlines three areas of conflict for these students: dialect, discourse forms, and worldview (1986). Using William Perry's research

(1968), she attempts to define academic worldview in order to clarify expectations and understand assumptions. Although admitting how culturally value-laden Perry's work is, Bizzell writes, "I would like to conclude by suggesting that we need a study of basic writers similar to that conducted by Perry–a series of interviews to tell us how they mediate between their home cultures and the academic culture as they move on through their college education" (1986, 300). Such a project would be extensive in scope. However, varied classroom ethnographies reflecting student experiences and changes could make important contributions to our understanding of this issue.

Ann DiPardo's work at the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy describes student experience in the context of the institution (1992). Her work looks not only at student attitudes but at the milieu of those working with students, from administrators to tutors. She uses interviews and student writing to describe some of the social and academic experiences of basic writing students. Her research indicates that many of the factors affecting situations where understanding as well as misunderstandings occur stem from personal histories and run deeper than color. In order to improve writing instruction, we need to recognize the deep social prejudices that are a part of our thinking and our institutions.

Feminist criticism has questioned the role of "difference" in how we teach academic writing. Acknowledging gender, race, and class differences, Susan Jarratt is concerned with power and authority in the classroom (1991). She writes that we need "to displace teacher authority with a more carefully theorized understanding of multiple forms of power reproduced in the classroom" (1991, 113). Feminist educators also question how to deal with issues of power and authority in the classroom where women are typically positioned differently. Other researchers have looked at the role of gender, asking how the gender of the instructor might play into the dynamics of the classroom (Eichhorn, 1992).

The learning environment is multidimensional, and theories and models must explore personal reactions as they affect cognitive and social development, and the teaching of writing. An important shift here is from pedagogical to social, cultural, gender, and institutional perspectives. These new insights about how these influences affect composition raise questions and problems: We are asked to look at the nature of power in educational and social institutions. We are asked to look at whose purposes are served by a specific approach to writing, a particular curriculum, or a method of research.

The nature of research is a critical issue in the field of composition. Traditionally, the university created theory, which was handed down to teachers. Research, however, has had many branches: scholarly, scientific, and educational. The current concern is that mutual appreciation among these forms of knowledge be established. Scholarly research based in literary or philosophical traditions has been skeptical about the role of scientific methodologies. Anne Berthoff has strongly voiced concern that composition remain scholarly in the vein of philosophy and literary studies (1991). On the other hand, socio-cognitive researchers such as Brandt (1992) speak out for the empirical data necessary to understand what happens when individuals write. Teachers are concerned that theories that create models are too often built on generalizations and do not respect the individual nature of the writing process. Workers in the field of composition need to understand the relationship among groups of knowledge makers in order to appreciate how they may complement rather than displace one another.

Practitioner Research

Teacher research is a growing area of composition. Historically teachers have not taken the time to publish their perspectives or connect their experiences to current theory. Lawrence Stenhouse and other action researchers have had an impact on teachers and encouraged them to participate in creating knowledge in this field (1975). Researchers/editors are noted for their work documenting writing instruction in its context (Branscombe and Schwartz 1992; Daiker and Morenberg 1990; Goswami and Stillman 1987). The National Writing Project has shown significant effects by creating communities of teachers who share experiences and develop ideas to meet the needs of their communities.

Teacher research complements other forms of research (Ray 1993; Daiker and Morenberg 1990; Goswami and Stillman 1987). Some forms of research seek to build models and theories and are concerned with reliability and the replicability of the data. Even when studying the minority, many researchers look for patterns of the majority and select the representative models that neatly support theory. The teacher, on the other hand, is concerned with individuals who do not fit the generalization, the situation in which a unique lesson is learned or an insight gained. Classroom experience keeps theories in check by questioning the position from which we interpret.

Practitioner research involving students as well as the teacher in writing interpretations reflects the very process it studies, the use of writing to describe and interpret. Cognitive researchers such as Vygotsky (1978) and Scribner and Cole (1978), and composition theorists such as Berthoff (1978) and Emig (1977) explore the connections between the use of written language and the creation of meaning. These ideas have also been important to educational research that studies and promotes the use of "writing to learn." James Britton (1975, 1970) and Toby Fulwiler (1986, 1982) advocate the use of informal writing in courses ranging from engineering to psychology, not only to master material and to solve problems but also to explain previously unarticulated feelings and concepts. Using writing to engage students in reflective observation and interpretation of their own learning generates a dual outcome. It produces data that contain the sort of discoveries/creations of meaning that writing often elicits, and it provides information about the use of writing to develop understanding of key concepts.

Just as theorists have looked at the role of writing in the process of cognition, theorists have looked at the role of research on the individual's perceptions and interpretations of situations. Evidence from action research has been used to encourage teacher research because of its effects on professional growth (Branscombe, Goswami, and Schwartz 1991; Daiker and Morenberg 1990; Oja and Smuly 1989; Goswami and Stillman 1987). Close observation, reflection, and writing about one's work encourages new insights and the motivation created by growth. When research is collaborative, individuals are continually recognizing multiple perspectives. Adriana Hernandez writes about articulating difference: "It seems to me that a recognition of the classroom as a space where tensions about race, gender, class and other differences are articulated is the first step away from a monological conception of pedagogy that reduces all consideration of formative processes to a language of methods and techniques" (Eichhorn 1992, 320).

Researchers who work with students as participant researchers have also recognized the benefits of research for students, whose awareness of their own learning is increased by a more active participation in observing and evaluating the classroom (Schwartz 1991). Observing, writing, and reflecting on the classroom situation has the potential for increasing the general awareness of learning as well as providing information about the situation. Research that describes and interprets the qualities of communication and thinking in these learning situations expands our vocabulary and enables us to talk about the territory that process has taken us into.

Summary/This Research

My research falls in the category of research referred to as "practitioner research," research in which the researcher is the teacher (North 1987). As a teacher and a graduate student, I have had one foot in the classroom and one foot in the university for many years. I know and use theory, but always temper it with experience. I do not see my research project as reflecting "pragmatic lore," "what has worked, is working, will work" (North 1987). Rather, I have attempted an exploratory project that seeks to understand dimensions of the classroom that I have felt intuitively but have not found adequately addressed in the research. In this case, I hope to raise new questions about individual experience, capturing its complexity and the diversity of the classroom.

Running through composition theory is a strong thread of interest in the relationship between the individual and the social. The history of rhetoric reflects a variety of attitudes about the relationship between the writer/the individual and society. Early rhetoric sought control, manipulation of audience. Expressive schools of writing emphasize exploration of individuality for the good of the society. More recent transactional theories of rhetoric work to understand the relationship of the writer to the world in a shared process of creating meaning. Another twist on this theme is the current debate in cognitive research which questions whether writing should be focused on as individual cognition or as social behavior. These theories are awkward models, but theories as heuristic are useful tools.

In order to gain information about what happens when individuals enter new groups, my research contributes specific data about one situation which reflects/recognizes the complex interaction and the individuality of these interactive processes. Detailed information about the instructor and the students' experiences should help us "check" theories and models.

When we research and write, we reach beyond our vocabulary to find ways of understanding and expressing what has not been said before. My research will build on the use of informal and formal writing in the context of classroom discussion to interpret experience–past experiences as well as reading, discussion, and writing experiences in the classroom. As a collaborative teacher/researcher, I worked with my students to develop an understanding of the dynamics of the basic writing classroom and to share this information with a larger audience.

My research is exploratory and will draw from both literary and socio-cognitive theories that recognize the use of language in the process of interpretation and meaning-making. Current critical theory recognizes the social nature of language use (Bakhtin 1986), and cognitive theorists (Bruner 1986; Vygotsky 1986, 1978) have emphasized the role of language in interpreting/creating meaning from our experiences in the world. Vygotsky has emphasized both the role of social experiences and written language in this process of meaning-making and reflection (1986, 1978). Researchers from the field of adult learning emphasize the role of reflection on past experiences, particularly reflection through writing, to create insights and encourage personal growth (Boud, Cohen, Walker 1990; Brookfield 1990; Dominice 1990).

My participant research contributes to current studies of literacy and the situation of basic writing instruction. Describing the social context of basic writers, Brandt has conducted interviews on literacy histories, collecting information about attitudes and experiences with reading and writing (1994). DiPardo has conducted an in-depth study of the institutional climate of basic writing courses, looking at inequities and prejudices (1992). Teacher/researchers, however, recognize the problem with generalizations and the need to continually describe, interpret, question, and dialogue about literacy.

Practitioner research also balances the particulars of quantitative research. One of my interests in this research is to achieve a better understanding of how students interpret/understand the varied puposes of writing, and to understand how issues of confidence affect authorship–the analysis and synthesis of ideas.

A quantitative approach to the subject of articulating intentions is a study done by David Wallace that compares entry-level and basic-level college writing students in the extent to which their ability to articulate initial intentions in writing affected their writing processes (1996). He concluded that students who were able to articulate their intentions wrote more successful papers. Wallace's research raises questions about how students come to understand the purpose of an assignment; where and how does this learning occur?

Another example of quantitative research is Pajares' and Johnson's work on confidence and competence (1994). Their methodology used a regression model consisting of the variables (self-confidence about writing, expected outcomes, writing apprehension, general self-confidence, and writing performance) and a pre-performance measure to account for variance in writing performance. Students' beliefs about their own composition skills and the pre-performace measure were the only significant predictors. Such results raise questions about previous and current classroom factors affecting student confidence and writing.

Both studies raise critical questions relevant to our understanding of "basic writers." These quantitative studies need to be complemented by studies that present "footage" of classrooms. Student as well as instructor perspectives about how learning takes place, the role of confidence, and the understanding of purpose should be included.

Other case studies of basic writers within the context of classroom provide similar but different insights on common concerns. For example, case studies described by Mike Rose on perceptions of expectations that basic writers bring the classroom reiterate the situations in which past experiences with writing instruction can inhibit flexibility and stifle language (1980). Rose recognizes that teachers must take into account what previous experience students bring to class and how it can hinder as well as help them. Another case study example is Stuart Greene's 1995 study of authorship in a beginning-writing classroom. He looks closely at social and cultural factors affecting the choices students make. Greene recognizes that when synthesizing information to present an argument, writers are influenced by attitudes about their place in the community. Greene also concludes that "individual cognition ignores the complexity of representing knowledge" (213). Robert Yagelski uses both case studies and quantitative research to document students' perceptions of revision as influenced by classroom experiences (1995). He notes that students continue to focus on lower-level concerns, although the class appeared to be characterized by process-oriented writing instruction. He concluded that the attitudes about writing which individuals bring to the situation may have a greater effect on students' writing than instructional approaches or the stated goals of those approaches.

Focusing on the classroom as a place for dialogue and critical thinking, Fishman and McCarthy present classroom research that describes diversity and student change, recognizing the limitations of both the expressionist and the social constructivist theories (1995). Rather than seeing change as dramatic transformations, they conclude that change is often "piecemeal and episodic, with students often contradicting themselves and denying any modification of their original views" (364). These multidimensional pictures of students and classrooms continue to raise questions and provoke insight in our profession.

Perl's work is a parallel piece of research, documenting students' interaction with text and classroom dialogue (1994). Although Perl is not working with basic writers, she describes the activities, the processes of reading, writing, and conversation in the classroom that enable individuals to work with complex ideas and analytical thinking, and from these experiences grow personally. She recognizes that confidence and authority are not taught but may begin to surface in a classroom.

My participant research comes from the internal dialogue between theories/research and what I experience in the classroom. The content and methods of my course are eclectic, drawing from the varied theories just discussed. My course has a strong emphasis on the process of writing. Individually and collaboratively, students go through all aspects of the writing process in class–remembering and generating ideas, shaping and organizing, revising and editing. Students in my course keep journals, free write, do varied informal writing, and produce formal papers (academic discourse and thesis statements). The expressive school of composition contributes to the environment in which my students work with journals and free writing. The transactional/interactionist school of rhetoric contributes to my sense of the classroom as a place where knowledge is created through interaction. Sharing reactions to the readings and to other students' writing encouraged honest discussion of the world–a process of meaning making and the development of a community of learners. We look for complexity in the text and difference of interpretation in the classroom. I find philosophical hermeneutics a comprehensive approach to critical thinking and interpretation. My vision for the course is that students come to understand writing in the contexts of self, communication, and community.

Along with this social aspect of communication is the individual process of writing as a means of working with experiences, feelings, and ideas. If writing is understood as a meaningful process of interpreting experience and the world, individuals may be motivated to write and to participate in communities of readers and writers.

I want to return to my questions as the teacher: What should I be teaching? How should I be teaching it? In reality, these questions are not neatly separated. While the content of my course is prescribed in part by history, situation, and my professional beliefs, the way I teach is critically dependent on what I know about my students. The purpose of my proposed research is to push the boundaries of that knowledge, to learn more about what they bring to the classroom and what they experience.

I designed the methods of my research to be easily replicable. Understanding that other teachers may not be writing a dissertation, I believe that the use of informal and formal writing (focused on histories, attitudes, and experiences in learning to write) in the context of classroom dialogue can provide valuable information and promote positive changes in both students and teachers.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Methods

Research provides an opportunity to look more closely at what we do and the situation within which we do it. As Ruth Ray reminds us, "'research' means to look and look again, and this process takes on many forms" (1993, 43). Research methodology must reflect both the researcher's purpose and her theory of knowledge.

The purpose of my research is to provide information about how individuals experience a writing class. This research is based on my understanding of knowledge as being socially constructed. Data will be collected from two sources: 1) written description of my interpretation of the situation as the instructor, a participant observer in the classroom; and 2) student formal and informal writings, many of which will reflect their histories, attitudes, and current experiences of the classroom. As action research, my methodology will make the process of research a "participant," which may affect the situation. This chapter will first look at methodology and then at the specific methods of this study.

Participant Observation in Classroom Research

My research falls into the category Frederick Erickson refers to as interpretive research within the family of participant observational research. He writes that "using as a basic validity criterion the immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actors' point of view, is crucial in distinguishing interpretive participant observational research from another observation technique . . . so called rich description" (1986, 119). The process of narrative description does not make research interpretive. It is "a matter of substantive focus and intent," (1986, 127) rather than of procedure in data collection that creates an interpretive method. Interpretive researchers ask questions related to the conditions of meaning that teachers and students create together (Erickson 1986, 127).

This emphasis on the interpretive quality of data collection fits with my interest in writing as it reflects specific processes of interpretation. The majority of data collected for this research is in the form of written interpretations by the teacher and the students. The emphasis is on what meanings students create in the writing classroom and how they interpret self, others, and expectations.

North quotes the anthropologist Clifford Geertz: [ethnography is the] "imaginative universe within which acts of the inhabitants `are signs' " (North 1987, 278). All description is seen as interpretation, which reflects the fuzzy lines between the humanities and the sciences.

While writing courses are housed in the humanities, they serve the sciences as well. This being the case, is writing to be studied as an art or a science? Because of my interest in writing as interpretation in its social context, I use methods from both the social sciences and the humanities in this research: from the social sciences, methods of ethnography, participant observation, triangulation, and action research provide research techniques; from the humanities, attitudes/philosophy about text, the study of language, meaning, and interpretation provide analytical methods. The lines here are not clearly drawn. While I will refer to this research as teacher/participant research, it is in the line of ethnographic participant research; theoretical comments from ethnographical research are often relevant.

Ruth Ray connects feminist inquiry and ethnography with the "tendency toward reflexivity-the willingness to observe oneself as the observer and to acknowledge the tentative, interpretive, and political nature of one's observations" (1993, 42). Ray emphasizes the importance of the personal and the unresolved in research. The tentative often leads to the next question (Ray, 1993). In some ways the attitudes of the humanities seem more in line with the kind of subjectivity that I reflect in this research.

The methodology of participant observation comes from ethnography's role in anthropology. The purpose of ethnography here is to provide "interpretive description and explanation of the culture, life ways, and social structure of the group" (Le Compte and Preissle 1993, 8). Because the teacher is immersed in the culture/situation over a long period of time, observations are built on experience and familiarity. However, the process of research–taking field notes, journaling, and interpreting–encourages the observer to see anew, to make the familiar foreign. This form of participant research has also been used in the new sociology of education to look at class, power, and cultural structures of the community (Le Compte and Preissle 1993, 18) and to contribute to cross-cultural psychology (Cole and Scribner 1974).

Recognizing the impossibility of the "objective," the participant/ observer's relationship to theory needs to be explicit. My research is descriptive rather than predictive (Le Compte and Preissle 1993, 39) and is inductive, generative, and constructive rather than deductive, verificative, and enumerative. However, I believe that each individual acts and perceives according to underlying theories. These middle-range theories, the so-called empirical generalizations, provide conceptual focus. Of the major theoretical perspectives (Le Compte and Preissle 1993, 131), I align this research with the transactional/interactionist theory and its attention to communication and cognition; with critical theory and feminist theory and their attention to relationships of domination and subordination; and with the subjectionist theory and its focus on the environment of writing instruction. Careful fieldnotes and journal work as data should show the interaction of theory and practice in specific situations and interpretation.

Collaborative-Action Research

In action research the process of interpretation becomes a player in the situation. Research is not outside looking in, but a character in the scene. Erickson discusses the causal effect of the natural process of interpretation. "If people take action on the grounds of their interpretations of the actions of others, then meaning-interpretations themselves are causal for humans" (1986, 127). Does the process of writing research make natural interpretation a more explicit act, and if so how does this affect a situation? This research may indicate that writing about past and present experiences in a classroom context appears to affect attitudes. However, a judgment of "more explicit" or "more effective" cannot be made.

Because I am a teacher, my research will be a project in which teacher and student participants are involved in the research, thus promoting the idea of "developing the school as a community of thinkers' " (Goswami and Stillman 1987, 5). While action research and collaborative research may refer to collaboration between universities and teachers (Oja and Smulyan 1989; Erickson 1986), it also refers to collaboration among teachers (Goswami and Stillman,1987; Daiker and Morenberg, 1990; Branscombe, Goswami, and Schwartz,1992). The purposes are empowerment of teachers and professional growth. However, precedence for collaboration among students and teachers can also be found (Schwartz 1992; Kazmierczak and Murphy Jr. 1990; Johnston 1992; Brice-Heath 1987; Holmsten 1987). These researchers discuss the value of including students in the research and including research in the curriculum. My research will document the experiences/effects of research in the classroom. My concern as a teacher is to bring out the voices of my students by making them true participants in this research process.

Social science research emphasizes the internal validity of research in terms of its representation of the whole picture. Sharan Merriam explains that the "assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing" (1988, 167). Strategies for capturing multiple perspectives include triangulation, member checks, peer examination, and participant modes of research.

"Triangulation" is the term used to describe the process of drawing on multiple data sources to ensure the completest possible representation of the subject under study.

"It assists in correcting biases that occur when the ethnographer is the only observer of the phenomenon under investigation" (Le Compte and Preissle 1993, 48). In anthropology this has often been accomplished through collaboration with participants as well as participant review of the researcher's interpretations.

My research will reflect multiple perspectives of the situation through data collected in the form of both formal and informal student writing as well as informal interviews with students. Using exact written descriptions of students' experiences and interpretations should keep my projections and interpretations balanced. Student review of my interpretations will be included as much as possible.

Methods of this Research

Collecting the Data

Data consist of field notes with artifacts, naturally occurring and elicited writings, and interviews. The time frame was ongoing throughout one complete semester. Data were collected from multiple sources in order to ensure triangulation and reflection of multiple perspectives. Data in most cases were in the form of writing, both formal and informal. The data were collected in the form of descriptive observations of the classroom, people, interactions, and behaviors; journals; formal papers in draft and final copies; reflection sheets on formal papers; and direct quotations from students about their experiences, attitudes, and feelings. Italics are used to indicate student were collected as equally as possible from all students.

As primary researcher, I collected field notes in the following forms: condensed accounts; brief notes taken on-site; expanded accounts; expansions of classroom experience; fieldwork journaling, expressing personal reactions and insights of research work; and analysis and interpretation, reflecting generalizations and theoretical tendencies (Spradley,1980). My methodology reflects my primary position as teacher and my secondary position as researcher. Whereas this merging of research and practice is important to professionalism, the differing roles need clarification. In collecting observational data in the classroom, my role as researcher is subordinate to my role as teacher. Emphasizing student writing as data facilitates this situation as does providing verbatim student interpretations rather than observations of their behaviors.

As collaborative researchers, student contributions took the following forms: journals, informal reaction writing, comments on paper drafts and final papers, and frequent open-ended questionnaires. Students' papers also were collected as data. Table 1 below provides specific details.

TABLE 1
Schedule of Data Collection

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	Total
Teacher field notes	8	8	6	8	8	38
Student formal papers	1	2	2	2	2	9
Student drafts	1	1	1	1		4
Student comments on drafts	1	1	1	1		4
Student journals	20	20	10	20		70
Informal class writings	4	4	3	4	1	16

A conscious effort was made to collect disconfirming data when data seem to be heavily weighted toward any generalization or supporting one particular theory. Ray notes that a major problem in data collection is "premature typification," establishing a hypothesis early in the research (Ray 1993, 144). This can be prevented by looking for disconfirming evidence.

Although descriptive and interpretive data were collected with a "wide angle view" (Erickson 1986, 143), formal and informal writings as well as open-ended questionnaires revolved around the following questions:

> How do students recall and reflect on their past experiences with reading and writing?
>
> What are teachers and students experiencing in this basic writing class?

How do these experiences affect individuals' sense of what they have to say and how they s

How do individuals think and feel about writing?

What roles do gender and culture play?

What happens when classroom conversation encourages subjective awareness and interpretation of learning experience by writing about it?

Choice of Participants

In order to understand how students experience basic writing courses, I chose to use typical-case selection and do research in my English Review course (English 109) at a college in the Southwest where I have taught full-time for six years. (I taught part-time for two years before being hired full-time as the writing specialist.) I am responsible for the curriculum of English 108 (English Fundamentals) and 109 (English Review), which are the basic college preparatory courses in the Developmental Studies division. Eighty percent of students entering this college are placed in English 108, so both of these courses are taken by a large number of students. I work collaboratively with other teachers who teach these courses, and thus am aware of not only my own questions and concerns, but those of other teachers.

I have chosen to do research in the English Review course because it is the most critical point of transition for students into college academic writing. Concerns with sentence structure, grammar, organization, and focus are coupled with concerns that students understand voice, audience, multiple perspectives, and critical thinking. The course is a challenge for teachers and students alike. The course is worth three credits, meeting twice a week for an hour and a quarter. Some students take a one-credit lab (English 109L) for supplementary work. The course has an exchange essay at mid-point where another instructor grades a set of essays so that students have another instructor's comments on their writing. The final essay in the course is graded by two other instructors and has a significant effect on the grade, although it is not an exit exam.

As a typical-case, students take this course because they placed in it on the placement exam or because they passed the previous course (English 108) with a C. The placement instrument includes a 45-question reading-comprehension instrument and a writing sample generated from a choice of three topics. Demographics may vary, but typically these classes are 75 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Native American, and 23 percent Anglo students. In the past year, this college has had an increase in various immigrant groups, so classes may include a student from Tibet, Poland, Albania, El Salvador, or Mexico. Representation of age groups varies. The average student age is 25, but I have had students from ranging from 18 to 60 years old. Gender representation is approximately 63 percent women. All students were aware of the research. In the first few weeks of the semester, I explained educational research and the goals of the project, and handed out a written statement of purpose. Every student had the option of not participating.

The research represents comprehensive selection of the bounded group. I will observed and collected written data from all participants in the class. The class started with 18 students: 12 women and six men. Two dropped the course in the first month. Three students did not pass the course. Informal interviews may be determined by purposive sampling, for example, interviewing particular students because of questions that surface during the research.

The class studied in this research is English 109, the developmental course that is a prerequisite for freshman composition. These students leave English Review and go into a freshman composition program that is philosophically aligned with current-traditional rhetoric. That course is organized around rhetorical modes, and process approaches are not generally used. Most writing is done in class, so there is little opportunity to work with drafting and revision. Students typically do not do informal writing. The course has a rigorous objective grammar test. My students will have to meet these departmental expectations regardless of my beliefs about teaching writing.

Factors considered in the selection of this case study were the standard nature of the course (the majority of students take this developmental English to prepare writing skills for college writing); representation of the community (students in this course closely represent the culture, gender, and age of the wider community); and the critical position of the course (preparatory English courses as well as freshman composition have had low success rates, especially for non-traditional students). As the researcher, I also chose this course because of my familiarity with it and because I have specific interest in documenting student perceptions of learning academic writing and in the development of shared concepts as well as discussion of attitudes and feelings relating to the classroom.

Interpretation

Interpretive research is inductive, generative, and constructive. The process of interpreting begins during data collection. The researcher starts with a "wide angle view" (Erickson 1986, 143) and proceeds to collect data through a problem-solving approach, noting patterns, developing concepts, checking patterns, and adjusting initial concepts. After the data have been collected, interpretation is an important aspect of communicating to readers the insights, the "key linkages" (Erickson 1986, 147), that the researcher has experienced. This need to show generalization within the data are kept in balance by noting both confirming and disconfirming evidence.

Interpretation in my research began with the collection of field notes and artifacts. Patterns and assertions emerged through an inductive process. The data were sorted into categories and analyzed for patterns and linkages. Multiple reading of the field notes facilitated the important search for discrepant cases. The production of an analytic narrative was critical in providing an effective description of the fieldwork research (Erickson 1986, 149). Discourse analysis of all data was an important part of data interpretation. The process of analysis brings together theory and practice.

The purpose of interpretation is to provide readers with an emic experience of the classroom and to share the researcher's insights. Clear explanations of patterns and linkages, as well as sufficient evidence to support interpretation, are important. However, disconfirming, as well as confirming, evidence needs to be a part of interpretation. One of the contributions of teacher research is that it complements the positivist paradigm (Ray 1993, 57) by dealing with complexity, uncertainty, and instability. For these reasons, I ground interpretation in the data and make self-conscious use of theory, thus providing insight into the practice of teaching and teacher research.

I have chosen to use the term "interpretation" rather than "analysis," recognizing the distinction between them (Ray 1993, 140). Analysis refers to discovering truth with proof and certainty; interpretation refers to constructing knowledge with doubt and uncertainty. Interpreting data, the researcher needs to clarify the role of theory. In teacher research, theory may function as a "lens, a philosophical perspective, or a stance" which functions as a process-"a way of seeing and thinking, rather than product-a body of information" (Ray 1993, 65). For example, both Vygotsky (1976) and Bahktin (1985) focus attention on the social aspect of communication and thinking, and thus provide tools for looking at classroom and text data. These theories also raise questions about individual cognition and the social experience. However, current controversy around interpretations of the theories of Vygotsky and Bahktin (Cazden 1986; Ewald 1993) emphasize the position of theory as a heuristic, which is in itself open to varied readings. My background, especially with Vygotsky, has given me a language for looking, not a theory for proving.

Theoretical triangulation is a way of using several theories to question and open up the data (Ray 1993, 64). In interpreting my data, I look at the data using different theoretical perspectives. A basic assumption of my research is the social nature of language and knowledge (Vygotsky 1978; Brandt 1992).

However, an equally important aspect of my research is the individual nature of socially constructing meaning (Flower 1989; Greene 1990). Theories of text analysis that reflect the individual's place in a history of language use (Bakhtin, 1986) are interesting in relation to the concerns of expressive rhetoricians (Elbow 1990) and feminist critics (Worsham 1991). This continuous balancing of multiple perspectives and theories is important to the quality of my interpretation of the data.

Considering current discussion of interpretive ethnography as discourse (Herndl 1991), I include my journal/field notes and personal reflections on the ethnographic process in the data. This research works with the reflective nature of writing to revisit interpretation by reconsidering perceptions and theoretical positions. I move back and forth between the roles of teacher and researcher. Thus, the inclusion of field notes is a critical component of the process, as is the reflection on field notes.

Herndl emphasizes the need to consider thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault and reflect on the values influencing our discourse. He writes, "Derrida is right when he says that the critical relationship we establish with our own discourse is a measure of its quality and fecundity" (Herndl 1991, 322). "Foucault approached the question of discourse by proposing a 'critical' analysis which explored the exclusions or constraints on discourse and a 'genealogical' analysis which described the effective formation of discourse in spite of the systems of constraint" (Herndl, 329). Such self-conscious subjectivity provides more complete data and is the expectation of our times.

The mechanics of interpreting this quantity of writing was challenging. The majority of writing occurred within set blocks of time with ongoing re-reading and reflecting. The purpose was to look at writings and field notes with fresh eyes, seeking insights rather than confirming old beliefs. Re-reading a set of papers from another angle often revealed different interpretations of the choices the writer was making or the possible reason for the choices made.

Writing was used to document, organize, and synthesize information and ideas. First, I wrote 10 chronological units, each merging field notes, sections of student writing, and insights. Each unit was written individually, looking for what that unit might reveal. This step created approximately 200 pages of writing. At that point, I only vaguely knew what my linkages or themes were. After several readings of these units, I began to see possible themes.

The writings that generated the most insights for me were the first two assignments. In some ways these assignments merged students' histories, families, and communities with their learning in the classroom. I also noticed that students made curious choices in creating these essays. I wanted to look more closely at these writings in their contexts.

The next step was to do more re-reading, reflecting, and writing; this included re-reading papers and field notes about classroom experiences and looking at other research. Linkages began to emerge as I worked closely with all the pieces. I could understand more about the choices students made. Themes began to surface again and again. Then I returned to later units to follow ideas through the semester.

The need for integrating theoretical references influenced the structure that was emerging. I decided to frame findings with Background/Theory and Concluding Comments. In the final stages, structure continued to be a challenge because my purpose was to communicate an experience of the classroom and the individuals and at the same time focus on emerging concepts. Individual as well as situational case studies were used in the interpretation to illustrate and support concepts. Structure evolved from the challenges of the material rather than from an initial concept. Writing was the tool for sorting, linking, synthesizing, shaping, and generating insight.

Challenges/Issues

The challenge of participant research in commonplace situations is always to see the situation in new ways (Le Compte and Preissle 1993; Erickson 1986). In this research not only did I need to meet this challenge, but I needed also to communicate something of this process to the student participants. My assumption is that when people share their perceptions and perspectives through writing, such dialogue and discussion has the effect of awakening people to the diversity of experience and new ways of seeing.

While interpretive participant research recognizes the individuality of experience, it raises questions about consciousness and experience, questioning the degree to which we are aware of our attitudes and feelings in specific situations. Do we recognize fear and intimidation? How much are we aware of motivation and its origins? An important aspect of participant/observer research is the explicit statement of assumptions and theoretical background; however, contemporary thinking recognizes the importance of the unconscious as well as the conscious. For myself as participant/observer and primary researcher, as well as for my students as collaborative researchers, this project reflected an experience of the use of writing in eliciting and exploring how and what we perceive. Writing and the sharing of writing created a unique opportunity for exploring experience.

Ethics

Respect for my students is my first concern and a factor in the design of my methodology. From the beginning of the semester students understood the nature of my project and their role as participants. The research in no way took away from classroom experience. I chose to use writing as the primary source of data to avoid as much projection and interpretation of others' behavior as possible. To ensure that students understood and were involved in the process, I had them read sections of the research when possible. Students have also looked at final stages of the project.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which research can be replicated. Reliability is based on a positivist perspective that seeks universals. Erickson explains how interpretive researchers take a different view of the uniformity that some research seeks: Interpretive researchers see such uniformity as the created meaning rather than universal truth (1986). These created similarities "mask an underlying diversity" (1986, 126). Positivist research seeks explanations and rules that can be taken from history and used in the future.

Interpretive researchers are more conscious that generalization can be dangerous in its damage to the individual, the particular. They see, as do teachers, the need for models that recognize and work with complexity, not simplicity. Interpretive researchers do not deny the patterns that exist in human behavior, but their approach to understanding these patterns is different. "The search is not for abstract universals arrived at by statistical generalization from a sample to a population, but for concrete universals, arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases studied in equally great detail" (Erickson 1986, 130).

Rather than looking at interpretive research in terms of replicability, we need to look at it in terms of the "dependability" and "consistency" of the data. Sharan Merriam suggests the following techniques to achieve this: 1) careful explanation of both the investigator's position in terms of theory and assumptions, and methods of data collection; 2) triangulation though multiple methods of data collection to strengthen internal validity; and 3) detailed documentation of data collection and decisions made by the researcher to create an "audit trail" (Merriam 1988, 172).

Internal Validity

Internal validity refers to the degree to which the data collected, analyzed, and presented reflects the whole of the situation. As Merriam states, the "assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing" (1988, 167). Internal validity, like reliability, is measured according to "dependability" and "consistency" (1988, 167). The quality of internal validity thus depends on the completeness of data, including explicit statements by the researcher of assumptions and theoretical positions, in order to portray the researcher's position as completely, as consciously, as possible. The completeness of data is also a product of specific representation of participants' voices and stories to provide multiple perspectives of the situation.

External Validity

The purpose or value of interpretive research is not in making generalizations, but in providing methods and insights of value to other educators. External validity is the degree to which the findings of one study are able to be generalized. The value of interpretive educational research is in understanding the particular rather than the general. Ray writes that for teacher/researchers, "validity is measured not so much in terms of adherence to formal research procedures, as in terms of what can be done practically and unobtrusively in the classroom and what would yield information of use to teachers and students working in similar situations" (1993, 92).

CHAPTER 4
Findings

Section 1
Writings About Learning to Read and Write

Background/Theory

In this interpretive research, I integrate my classroom experience with my understanding of theory. Writing instruction needs to be interpreted and represented in context to allow teachers and researchers to communicate and develop understanding of their critical common concerns.

The work of Vygotsky (1978, 1962) and John-Steiner (1994) influences my interest in an interactionist approach. Vygotsky brought attention to the roles of both social interaction and written language in developing the intellectual function of language. John-Steiner writes, "The acquisition and functions of language and literacy are inseparable from social contexts, roles, and institutions" (1994,5). In this research, it is the teacher's and students' interpretations of activities and discussion around writing in the classroom as well as students' written interpretations of past educational experiences that provide the data.

The complete list of writing topics for the semester was:

- narrative on reading and writing
- family/community research on reading and writing
- summary of reading in the text
- midterm in-class essay (summary and reaction to a reading from the text)
  - description paper with a purpose

letter to the editor of the book
short research paper
summary and reaction to a reading

After working extensively with the complete data from the semester, I decided to look closely at the first two writing assignments and then at later writings that follow surfacing themes. The first assignment was an autobiographical essay describing the student's history with learning to read and write; the second was an informal research paper in which the students explored family or community attitudes toward reading and writing. The purpose of these assignments is twofold: 1) to introduce students to writing as a process of recall, reflection, exploration, and problem solving; and 2) to provide me with specific information about my students' histories and attitudes. This research presents these assignments in the context of classroom experience for two reasons. First, the complexity of narrative writing as both a personal and social process deserves attention. And, the nature of these assignments provides a model of educational research in which the collection of data, interpretation, and problem solving is placed in the hands of the participants/students as well as the teacher/researcher.

These two assignments need to be understood in the context of the course being studied. English 109 is the course preparing the majority of students at this college for freshman composition; it meets twice a week for a 16-week semester. Students write eight major papers, handing in early drafts for the instructor's comments. They work collaboratively in small groups for revision and editing.

The first narrative essay is a personal history of reading and writing, and the second informal research essay is an exploration of family/community attitudes toward reading and writing. They are, therefore, more personal than other assignments. Because of their nature, they provide both specific information in the content of the paper about individuals' experiences and interpretations, and an opportunity to study students' use and understanding of writing as a reflective, explorative process. Assignments later in the semester demand more "academic" writing.

Narrative Expository Writing

Narrative assignments are controversial. Many composition teachers do not believe that personal narrative contributes to the development of academic writing, although others see it as an important part of the curriculum. Composition theorists (Flower and Hayes 1981; Rose 1987; Bartholomae 1987, 1995; Elbow 1991, 1995; Rubin 1992) are concerned with the development of skills necessary for academic writing, what these academic skills are, and how they are developed. Some have put academic writing and personal writing at odds with each another. As Bartholomae writes:

> Personal writing/academic writing–this opposition is the structural equivalent to other arguments, arguments about authorship and ownership, about culture and the individual. . . . I read Peter's {Elbow} work as part of a much larger project to preserve and reproduce the figure of the author, an independent, self-creative, self-expressive subjectivity. I see the argument against academic writing, and for another writing, sometimes called personal or expressive writing, as part of a general argument in favor of the author. . . (1995, 65).

Personal writing is often put in the category of the Romantic tradition. Berlin writes that this school of thinking "valued the individual voice, the unique expression that indicated a gifted and original personality at work" (1987, 45). It is important, however, to note that those in this tradition believe that the individual is moving to a greater understanding of the whole through this individual process.

This debate's interpretation of narrative implies that writing narrative promotes an independent subjective experience. However, this study looks at expository writing in the classroom to understand it as a social process as well as an individual activity.

This study also looks at how self-expressive subjectivity may be related to using language for problem solving and critical thinking.

Studying situations in which individuals develop language/communication skills, one becomes aware of the complexity of the concept "the author." Valuing personal writing, Elbow defends his position with a sensitivity to the student's process of developing confidence and voice in a situation with others. Comparing first-year students to experienced writers, Elbow writes:

> Most first-year students have a strong sense of the trouble they can get into with writing, but they tend to lack that writer's corresponding gift for taking themselves too seriously–pride in the importance of what they have to say. . . . Once a student can really begin to own and care about her ideas, that will lead naturally to the necessary combat–which will lead to some cultural sophistication in itself (1995, 81).

Looking at the expectations of academic writing is very different from understanding and working with the way/the situations in which academic skills are nurtured and understood. Research focusing on experienced writers does not provide insight into the situation of basic writers. I have observed that the emphasis on the detail of experience encouraged through narrative assignments develops both specificity in writing and provides memory material for reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving. Having observed the reflective and critical thinking that often comes when students write seriously about personal experiences, in my role as teacher/researcher I am particularly interested in these assignments. They document attitudes affecting the kinds of thinking–recalling, reflecting, problem solving–students do and are expected to develop for academic writing.

Information about Students' Past Experiences

As researcher/teacher, I have chosen to look at these assignments and the classroom context because they provide descriptions and interpretations of past learning experiences in the students' own language. The classroom situation reveals current feelings and thoughts about reading and writing. This situation and the assignments also reveal attitudes about honesty and authority, assumptions about academic expectations, and expressions of the personal meaningfulness of reading and writing. Researchers in composition have recently broadened their interests to include a better understanding of community experiences and attitudes toward literacy. Brandt asks us to look at the social, cultural, historical, and economic experiences writers carry into the writing situation (1994, 1992).

> If we are going to understand better what literacy instruction represents to students in the future and how it sometimes, inexplicably, can go awry, it is especially important to know about the settings in which knowledge of reading and writing have come to them and the significance implied in those settings. We must understand better what is compelling literacy as it is lived (1994, 477).

Classroom Context of the Assignments

Looked at in the context of classroom discussion and activities as well as students' informal writing, these assignments provide insights into students' current attitudes about reading and writing. Researchers have asked us to look at the learning situation of this group of students who are facing the challenges of entering post-secondary institutions (Perry 1986; Bizzell 1990; DiPardo 1992). Feminist writer Jarratt asks for an understanding of power and authority in the classroom (1992). Jennie Nelson emphasizes the importance of understanding what students bring to the situation in terms of assumptions and attitudes. She cautions that "students develop interpretive practices and approaches that may undermine the goals of disciplinary writing and learning" (1995, 412). Nelson has observed that students too often understand writing assignments as situations for retelling and summarizing what they have read rather than situations for questioning and problem solving. The problem is often that students have focused on the text (summarizing, reviewing) rather than on critical issues and problem solving.

These concerns go along with other researchers (Moffet 1982; Fulwiler 1986; Walvoord and McCarthy 1990) who are concerned with writing in conceptualizing, critical thinking, and problem solving. Through close study of writing and the classroom context, I note how students interpret assignments and classroom activities and when and how these interpretations shift. Can we understand something about students' purposes by looking at choices made in their narratives? Nelson refers to students interpretive processes here as "reading the classroom" (1995, 418). She writes, "The writing assignments in a classroom are just one element of this larger `text' that students must interpret and define for themselves. Studies of students writing across the disciplines confirm the importance of classroom literacy, of being able to read classrooms as text, in shaping students' responses to writing assignments" (1995, 412-413). Thus, using classroom observations as well as informal writing, I attempt to understand how students' interpretation of this narrative and research assignment may have affected the choices they made and how they shaped their texts.

Reflective/Interpretive Processes

I am also focusing on these assignments because their nature contributes to a model of educational research in which the collection of data, interpretation, and problem solving of a situation is put in the hands of the participants/students as well as the teacher/researcher. In a recent research project, Brandt collected histories of early reading and writing experiences through interviews to "explore literacy learning as it has occurred across the twentieth century" (1994, 461). While her research collected family and school background information similar to mine, the intent of my research is not just the accumulation of information, but the participation of students in the interpretation of their experiences, writing and talking about literacy. Classroom discussions and student writing provided me with the information to understand specific student experiences and to see general patterns. However, using this process, I was also handing over the interpretive aspect of these histories and encouraging students to problem-solve issues in their own situations.

In the past, narratives have been examined in terms of structure and style. More recently researchers have begun to look at the function or purpose a narrative serves the teller or writer. DiPardo asks us to appreciate the complexity of writing. She states, "The need emerges to look at writing as a flexible, many-faceted phenomenon involving divergent and ever-shifting goals, engaging the whole self in all its interwoven dimensions–the cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual" (6). I am interested in looking at the narrative assignments in this research for indications of how students perceive these assignments as well as reading and writing in general, and how classroom experiences may effect changes in these perceptions. DiPardo refers to such critical insights as "those dynamic points of connection where experience gives rise to inquiry" (2). Understanding these shifts may help us understand how individuals come to use language for problem solving and critical thinking.

Students were given space and time to use writing and classroom interaction for personal reflection and possible problem solving. Thus, these personal reflective assignments on literacy provide specific and general data for me, and at the same time create a situation putting data collection, interpretation, and problem solving in the hands of the participants/students.

Assignment 1

The Semester Begins

English 109 met on Tuesdays and Thursdays for an hour and 15 minutes. The semester began on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The college did not honor the holiday that year. A few protestors were in front of the school, but students in English 109 had little concern about them. I began class by having students interview one another and then introduce each other to the class. We then went around the room until everyone could give each student's name. After these ice-breakers, I asked the students to do some research about Martin Luther King Jr. and give me a writing sample on Wednesday. I then asked them to write about what makes writing good. After they wrote, they talked in small groups.

As the students wrote, I surveyed the class, 18 students. (I will use pseudonyms for reasons of privacy.) There was Lucas who had been in this class several semesters ago and dropped it. I knew something about his history. For the past three semesters, he had taken the class, always dropping it or failing at the end. English is his second language. He is from Mexico and owns an automotive business. Elito, Carmela, Dorothy, and Sally had taken my English 108 class the previous semester. Susan had been in a reading lab with me several semesters ago. The two Anglos in the class were older: Connie, a nurse, and Mark, an older gentleman with thinning hair, who fidgeted and had an anxious expression on his face.

When the class came back together after working in groups, Isabella took the lead. "Good writing happens," she said, when you are "connecting writing to soul." She added that the previous semester in English 108, she had felt somewhat blocked compared to English 107 in her first semester at the college. John said, "Writing is good because it lets your feelings out." This comment led the class into a discussion of their confusion about my question. One student said, "Your question is unclear." I agreed, saying, “There are two ways of interpreting my question, ‘What makes writing good?’ Are we asking why writing is good for us, or what makes a piece of writing good? A sentence can have many meanings; we have to think of the listener or the reader, and make our intentions clear. Understanding involves considering the situation. We then discussed how evaluating writing also entails looking at the situation. For whom are we writing? What is our purpose?"

Mark, the older gentleman, became increasing uncomfortable. He asked, "What do you mean, there isn't a fixed explanation of `good writing' and `bad writing'? Aren't we here to learn what is right and wrong?" I explained that the answer is sometimes relative to the situation. Class was over. Students who knew each other chatted as they left.

A Look at the First In-Class Free-Write

In my classrooms, students frequently free-write on a topic we are going to discuss or a topic we have discussed previously. These short informal writings give each student an opportunity to articulate his or her ideas, and they provide me with insight into students' thinking. This first day of class I asked them to write about "What makes writing good." The purpose of this exercise was to start students thinking and sharing about the topic for the first paper.

"What makes writing good?" was an open-ended question, so students interpreted the question several ways. One group of seven students understood the question to be about why the writing process is good. They answered the question in terms of the value of expressing one's self, using the imagination, organizing thinking, and communicating with others. For example, John wrote, *"The ability to express your deep thoughts and feelings in your own words. Writing can help a person let out happiness, aggravation, stress, or even love. It is also a tool for everyday life."* Angela wrote, *"Writing to me gives me, the time to imagine an adventure and express it into words."* Isabella wrote, *". . .to get your point across. To be able to see the picture in ones mind throw the words."* Mark wrote, *"It helps get your ideas across to a wide variety of people also with enough instructions and practice you'll get organized."*

Lucas was also concerned with being understood. He wrote, *"I think what make writing good is being able to write something and have someone read it and they be able to understand what the paper is all about."*

Another group of six students thought the question referred to the qualities of good writing. Many of these writings sound like statements from recent English classes. Some described the qualities of writing. For example, Carmela wrote, *"In order to understand writing; sentence structure should be organized, sentences should be written in correct form and punctuated correctly. All paragraphs in writing should revert back to the main point of the story in some manner. This will connect all of the paragraphs together which will bring true meaning to a story."* Thomas wrote a concise, direct statement: *"The accuracy, organization, and how well the ideas are placed on paper."*

The other five students describe the process that creates good writing. Reflecting her concern with knowing the basics, Lynne wrote, *"What makes writing good is knowing the proper use of punctuations and grammar. If you are familiar with the way a sentence is written correctly, it is easier for the reader to understand where you are headed . . ."* Describing her sense of audience, Sally wrote, *"The basic essentials to writing well would be to write as if you were speaking directly to someone . . ."* Showing a concern for content and spelling, Adela wrote, *"The way you make writing. You really have to know what your talking about. You also need to know how to spell. It always helpful to the teacher, if you can speak well."*

These writings were shared in small groups and discussed to some extent as a class. The responses gave me a sense of the perceptions students brought to class. The different interpretations of this question are quite revealing. Students who answered the question in terms of how writing benefitted them perceived the question in terms of the functional purpose of writing. Students who answered the question in terms of what made writing good were focused on text.

Back to the Classroom

On Thursday, for the second class, we started our discussion of reading, which would lead into the subject of the first paper topic: a personal history of the student's experiences with reading and writing. Students had read two essays by Richard Rodriguez, "Aria: Portrait of a Bilingual Childhood" and "The Achievement of Desire." Both essays reflect Rodriguez's experience as a second-generation Mexican-American and the conflicts he felt between home and school culture. Rodriguez does not believe in bilingual education and wants culture kept out of the classroom.

Rodriguez's educational philosophy presents a starting point for discussion. In the past, classes have had diverse reactions. Some students can see the internal conflicts in his arguments and deconstruct the essay. Other students have been confused. Mark addressed the cultural issue when he said, "I understand Rodriguez because I talked to Lucas the other day and understand how hard it must be to be in school in a foreign country." Thomas spoke up and said there was a conflict between school and home culture, but he wouldn't say more. I prodded, but to no avail. No one would say anything about racial or cultural aspects of schooling.

I introduced the idea of the community–the culture–of school. I talked about my experience of being in the first generation in my family to go to college. No one said anything. As the semester progressed, this topic became central for many students. That day, though, the conversation went down the path of "What is wrong with the high schools?" and "Why do we have such a high drop-out rate?" Recent high school students complained about teachers who did not care, and students who did not want to be in school. The reasons behind the apathy were hard to draw out. Isabella was more outspoken than the others. Punctuating her comments with "shit," she spoke of how her abusive home situation made it easy for her to get into partying and not caring about school. Students were quiet, uncomfortable perhaps with her honesty.

Students seemed to be uncomfortable with negative comments about school when they were personal. Students could talk for hours about the problems of the school in general, but when Isabella's story reflected a personal situation, they became nervous. Elito smoothly turned the discussion to his positive experiences coaching soccer at a local high school. He said that the students (athletes) he had worked with finished high school and appreciated their freedom in America. He added, "Coming from where I do, the school system in America is great."

Elito's comments communicated a positive attitude. I know Elito from last semester. I also know about his experiences growing up in El Salvador, his stories of violence and loss. I ask myself, "How does a person learn to cope with such pain at such an early age?" I watch Elito. His classroom personality is always humorous, uplifting, and positive.

I tried to connect our discussion with honesty in writing, referring to the Malcolm X essay "Awareness of Language," as well as the Rodriguez essays. The Malcolm X article is autobiographical, describing his discovery of a need for language while in prison. He emphasizes the power of language to express ourselves, our lives. I emphasized that when individuals write about their specific experiences, everyone benefits. Looking back, I do not think students saw these essays as models at this point. They had not experienced the effect or power their writing had on each other. How could they identify with professional writers' talk of the power of language?

Compared to the younger students, my oldest student was more conscious of the conflicting feelings created by this emphasis on each individual's experience. Mark had been uncomfortable with ambiguity the first day. He said, "I don't get it. Where do all these opinions go? Someone on top has to make the decisions about things." Mark continued to voice a need for authority even after I suggested that decisions are made in many ways.

I felt like I had done more talking than I wanted to during this class period. Next week, when the draft of the first paper would be due, I planned to use group work to shift some of the responsibility for explanation to the students.

A Look at the Draft of Paper #1

As described on their schedule of assignments, the topic for this first paper was the following: "The experiences we've had shape the way we feel and think about communication, reading, and writing. Write a paper describing your history with reading and writing. Remember and describe as much as you can about the situations where you experienced reading and writing." Because the first draft was due the second week of class, other than the discussions of Rodriguez, students had little classroom experience to shape their sense of what their focus should be. The topic was open, open to individual memory and focus.

Students brought the draft for Paper #1 to the next class. Throughout the semester students did work sheets for reflection on their drafts–and often on their final papers–in order to look once again at what they had written. The work sheets had questions for the individual to answer and questions for the group to answer. Students did the first part individually and the second part in small groups of two or three students. They handed in the work sheets and their drafts to me. Before doing these work sheets, I emphasized the purposes: re-reading your writing carefully, thinking and looking at your writing process, and learning to help each other talk about writing.

After students had filled out the individual work sheet, they formed small groups and shared their papers. Did I catch one of Mark's puzzled looks as he moved to join Kass and Sharon in a group? This was his first experience with group work; others were experienced with this type of work and immediately began talking. I overheard Isabella telling Sally how to add details, Connie talking to Angela about Angela's being bilingual. Sally said to Isabella, "I had trouble with the flow of your paper. Maybe you can switch some of the paragraphs around. That's what I need to do too." Isabella replied, "I think that we're about at the same level with this." As the group discussed each paper, the one who had written it answered the questions on the work sheet. This allowed students to use the group suggestions when working on the final paper.

The group work this second week of class was definitely an important activity for students in getting to know each other. A lot of curiosity and a lot of storytelling was going on. I could hear students sharing detailed school experiences and asking each other many questions. I heard Roger say to Mark, "What was hard for you?" As they finished group work, Sally said, "Do we get to keep these? It's really helping me. Do I have to hand in my draft now? I know what I need to do." I collected the drafts and the work sheets to add comments myself before returning them.

Paper #1 provided a wealth of information about the individual nature of the students' experiences with reading and writing. Bruner discusses the role of narrative to make sense of our experiences (1986). He describes it as "the landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel" (14). The work sheet on the draft also provided more information about what they thought about their papers and what they could say about their process of writing it.

Writing an essay on an open-ended question is an interpretive process allowing the individual to recall personal experiences and make choices about focus. Because these memories and associations are written in private, the information may have a different quality than information collected in interviews. I have noticed that early writings in these courses are generally "writer-based prose" (Flower and Hayes 1981). Although a variety of factors may affect choices, I believe that these first drafts are valuable indicators of what individuals remembered about early experiences with reading and writing. In terms of experience with genre, most of these students have limited experience with written narrative, especially autobiographical topics focusing on a particular situation to reflect on and explore a topic (e.g., educational experiences.) Although the students had read the Rodriguez and Malcolm X essays and discussed the free-writes they had done the first day, these readings did not seem to influence the content or style of these papers.

The first drafts of the first paper in these courses are typically general. Most students have not had experience writing with detail or using specifics. Adela's first sentence is typical of this more general writing: *"My history with reading and writing, as far back as I can remember, were somewhat difficult for me to learn. I remember I had a hard time in school trying to read and yet write what I wanted to say."*

One benefit of looking at the first draft is that students have written their papers in isolation. After sharing drafts and having their memory stimulated by other students' writing, students write drafts which have more specifics, more details. They are also more influenced by an understanding of reader and expectations.

I wanted to know from these papers what my students had experienced, how family, community, and school had shaped their attitudes. In interpreting and organizing information from these papers, I read the papers many times, looking for emerging themes. I also was influenced by theory and experiences which have indicated to me the relevance of social, cultural, and gender factors in learning. Because of my interest in motivation and the use of writing as a tool for thinking and problem solving, I sought attitudes reflecting whether reading and writing were seen as meaningful activities. In organizing information from these papers, I have categorized comments according to the following references: culture; family; school and learning modes; student's sense of the meaningfulness of reading and writing; and observations about confidence and assertiveness. These categories/groupings surfaced after several readings of the papers.

In describing these data, I will use quantitative figures when they seem significant. I hope that through this narrative, the reader will come to know these students. Gradually the pieces of their personalities will fall into place, and the reader will have a sense of some of the individuals.

References to Culture

I use the word "culture" in this context to refer to community values as well as ethnic values. Considering that the students' reading had been about cultural aspects of learning, I looked for references to cultural issues affecting learning to read and write. Although the readings were strongly focused on cultural issues, not one paper made a reference to culture or language relating to their histories with reading and writing. On one work sheet, Adela noted that the group wanted to know about her "*growing up in the spanish culture.*"

Sometimes out-of-class experiences provide insight and information that would not or does not come up in class. One such situation arose in the Writing Center about the time students were working on Paper #1. While little was written in class about culture at this point in the semester, I did receive some indication that the readings were sparking ideas and discussion. The following exchange made me conscious that the topic of culture was generating some discussion at home, although I did not see it in the papers.

I stopped to visit with Elito and his friend, Jesus, who is from Mexico. Elito was writing about learning to read, and he immediately jumped into the topic of bilingual education, and how his sister was teaching her daughter to speak and read in Spanish as well as English. He had been telling Jesus that he disagreed with his sister. He said, "A person should learn to read in English even if they speak Spanish everywhere but at school." I tried to explain my understanding of second-language learning and the value of reading in one's first language, but Elito did not agree. He was convinced that the best thing to do was to give up one's first language. Elito's attitude about the value of maintaining one's native language and the school's recognition of culture in this changed quite dramatically by the end of the semester. However, at this time his concern was with how difficult it had been for him to learn English and that children should have it easier by initially learning to read and write only English. At this point in the semester, he does not seem to consider the cultural effects of denying a first language at school. Elito agreed with Rodriguez. It is important to note this debate because Elito's papers did not mention any language or cultural conflicts associated with schooling.

References to Family

Although students made no reference in these first drafts to culture, five students out of the 17 referred to reading /writing in family contexts. Connie, who is a nurse from Canada taking the course for personal interest rather than as a requirement, described a supportive home atmosphere, as the following excerpts from this draft show:

> *I grew up in a home where reading was fun, my mother read for her pleasure and for us children's too. My father also always seemed to be reading a magazine like* Time. *I recall hours of bedtime stories. . . . By the time I turned six, entering the first grade, I was `ready for reading.' . . .*
>
> *I remember my mother writing letters many evenings. She was insistent after Christmas or birthdays, after receiving gifts, that my brother and I write thank-you letters. . . .*

Elito's references to family are mixed. In El Salvador, Elito had very positive experiences with schooling, but was encouraged to drop out of school to work. The following shows the mixed feelings of his school and home:

> *It took me about two months to get comfortable with my book. Half way into the book I found little stories about dragons and giants, and every afternoon I remember my teacher reading to the class one of the stories. It sound so pretty that I wanted to be able to read too. Since was my first time in school, reading was hard and the only thing that occurred to me was memorize one of the stories. After coming home from school, I used to practice memorizing Pedrito y La Hormiguita. It took me about a week to memorize the story. I told the story to my mom, friends, and my teacher they all like it.*
>
> *My experiences as a reader were poor maybe because in house nobody knew how to read. I hardly remember listening to someone reading to me as I was growing up. My dad only had done second grade and my mom dropped school when she was in fourth grade.*

Sometimes a paper reflected confusion about reading at home. Mixed comments in a paper may indicate confusion between what a student thinks is expected and the student's experience. Adela wrote the following:

> *Mom and Dad played a big role in my studies. They Mom and Dad read to me every night. Wether it would be prayers or a sentence of a paper or wherever I saw something (words) that wasn't familiar to me. And that I wanted to know. Mom and Dad didn't read to me all the time. I know I had my share of reading. There was a lot of reading to do. But as time went on, I learned, thanks to Mom and Dad, how to read very well. Now, I can't stop.*

Two other references to family influences were descriptions of family situations in which other family members did not value reading. Carmela begins the paper with the following: *My experiences with reading and writing were neither encouraged, nor discouraged by my parents. Everything that I experienced or learned in school was up to me.* She then described an incident in junior high school when she failed to ask the teacher questions that would have helped her pass the course. Carmela reflected on where her school behaviors came from when she described an attitude experienced at home:

> *I failed the class myself by not asking the teacher to help me with what I did not understand.*
>
> *I always hesitated to ask my teachers questions if I did not understand what was being taught. All through my twelve years of going to school as a child and teenager, I was never encouraged to do better than what I did in school At home my parents taught my sisters, my brother, and I never to ask questions but to sit down behave and shut up. So, when I went to school I did not always ask my teachers questions if I did not understand what was being taught. Not allowing myself to ask the teachers questions made it difficult to learn what was important in school, like learning to write.*
>
> *The attitude of my parents about my education was, if I did good in school fine, if I did not do good in school that was also fine. So, I developed chance to prove that I can do it.*

Carmela's draft shows her conflicting attitudes about individual and parental responsibilities for learning. This passage demonstrates her awareness of a family attitude that made school difficult. Her writing also shows Carmela's present commitment to take responsibility for learning.

Family experiences often may not be pleasant to recall. While some students immediately remember experiences, other students need to work at remembering. One student seems to talk herself through this process in her paper. Sharon starts by trying to recall experiences with reading:

> *As I try to search my memory while I was growing up, I cant seem to remember much about my parents ever reading to me or my brother or sisters. I realize that maybe that is why I am such a poor reader, even now that I am thirty-six I*

> *tend to do every thing else but read. It's almost like I put it off to the last moment. Reading is the very last thing on my list. dont get me wrong I like to read I just wont make time for it. I am trying to search my memory as to why? As I am thinking back as a child I remember I was reading a book. I must of been in fourth grade. I remember some one really getting angry with me becouse I was reading and my chores were not done or something to that effect. In fact this happened several times to me. I was told that I was lazy and that I had no business reading until the house was clean. Now that I am able to pull up some of these memories of my childhood, reading was not always a positive things to do. I guess when they told me that I was lazy so long ago, it has stuck to me. Well at least I know why my house has to be cleaned and everything in order before I will sit down and read.*

Sharon's paper contains not only the process of recalling the memories, but also reflections on how those experiences are affecting her today.

Isabella's paper also reflects a situation where family had a negative influence on learning to read and write. Her first draft was very undeveloped, as the following section illustrates:

> *From what I can understand, I was to be reading the frog book and I wanted to read the bunny book. The bunny book to me was cute and I wanted to be like all the other kids in my class. The teacher told me that I was more advanced and could read the frog book. This is were it all started, the door went up in my head and the reading just stopped.*
>
> *This is when my dad started to tell me I was stupid and could not do any thing right. As a child I grow up believing this for many years. I was so afraid to read that I even forgot how to spell my last name in the third grade.*

References to School and Learning Modes

Of course, many of these categories overlap. Of the 15 drafts of Paper #1 looked at, 13 papers discussed reading/writing situations in elementary school. Two wrote about creative writing in junior high school, and three made references to reading or writing in high school. It seems significant that the majority of memories recalled were associated with elementary school. I'd like to look at the nature of these early memories.

While Isabella's school experience was marred by her family situation, Angela's school experience marred her early feelings about reading and writing. She wrote the following:

> *My experience with reading and writing, have been very interesting. I used to love to read when I was a child. When I entered the fourth grade reading became a very big problem for me. I couldn't comprehend what I was reading. The teacher thought that I was retarded, because I remember all the testing That I had to do. There was reading, writing, and even picture test which thought was a lot of nonsense. They never found anything wrong with me, just that I was a little slower than others. I also have a little case of dyslexia which isn't to bad. So I used to set very high goals for myself, and when I found out that I couldn't do the work I became very disencourage in school.*

Many of these papers recalled learning in terms of the auditory, kinesthetic, and visual senses. References to auditory, visual, or kinesthetic memories indicate students' internal sense of their learning and provide me with important information about their learning modes. Several students recall the pleasure of hearing stories read aloud. Carmela recalls, *"The librarian would read the story with such excitement and enthusiasm that it made the whole class excited about reading books."* Elito wrote, *"I* *like listening to people's reading, and I find reading so beautiful that I decided to start reading."* Some students describe the cross-over from one sense to another. Carmela writes:

> *By learning the letters of the alphabet I thought I could spell any word that I wanted to had imagined.*

Connie describes a strong visual memory of her learning when she remembers:

> *My first recollections with writing begins in the third grade. I remember note books where my first line ran the whole page, but my left margin drifted to the right. As I wrote down the page, my lines became shorter and shorter, and from a distance, the page of writing looked like an inverted triangle. I don't remember deriving pleasure nearly so quickly from writing words on paper as from reading other writers' words on a page.*

In many ways students are aware to some degree of their modes of learning. This awareness has already given them clues about how to succeed in school. Adela writes:

> *The only problem I had with reading was when someone like the teacher would read to me, I didn't get anything out of what was read. I learned and discovered that if I read to myself I could understand and read faster as I went. I had not problems with reading difficult words. I understood really what everything meant.*

Adela has realized that she understands more when she is looking at the words than when she was just listening. Adela also writes, *"I did great in spelling. I went to spelling bee's and won most of the time. But that never really helped me in my writing.*

These writings provided me with a sense of my students' experiences, giving me their individual memories and perceptions related to reading and writing. These writings brought to the surface information about individual ways of learning for both the students and me.

References to the Meaningfulness of Reading and Writing

I looked at the papers closely in terms of students' expressions of the meaningfulness of reading and writing in order to understand how students related to these activities. One of my interests is in the way students perceive reading and writing, whether it is something that is a requirement of school or is a personally meaningful activity. A clear division seems evident between those who make some reference to a personal sense of "Why read or write?" and those who struggle with these activities as mere school expectations.

References to the Meaningfulness of Reading

Looking for what reading meant to these students as learners, I noted what students remembered reading. Only Elito, Connie, John, and Mark specifically mentioned titles. Marcos remembers *Coquito* and *Pedrito y La Hormiguita*. Connie remembers Heidi and Black Beauty. John remembers reading Of Mice and Men. Mark writes, *"Comic books were my most adventuresome trip into the figuring out of what words I could read on my own with confidence. The world open[e]d like a spring flower when the sun's rays first touch them in the morning."*

Several students describe reading experiences and the traditional book report in which reading and writing are an academic challenge. Thomas describes the book report as a challenge of the school situation when he writes, *"My first major test came when I was in my last year at elementary school. I had been assigned to do a book report on the killer whale. The skills I had learned thus far were put to the test as I had to research, take notes, and write a book report about the killer whale."* As Thomas' writing often indicates, he is quick to meet a challenge.

Dorothy's experiences with book reports are not as meaningful. She writes about junior high school:

> *I didn't read as much as I did when I was in elementary school. I wouldn't g reading at this time in my life. . . . The next year I started going to high school. I s*

Dorothy goes on to describe how she became an avid reader high school, but with little understanding of what she was getting from the activity except that *"[r]eading relaxes me so I have continued doing it."* Grasping for the purpose of writing, Dorothy continued her discussion of book reports. *"This [writing book reports] was horrible because I had trouble describing what I felt about the book and what the meaning of the book meant to me."*

Students relate to assignments in different ways. Lynne discovered a purpose for writing in her "resource class." She writes, *"With the help of this class, I learned to combine reading and writing together. By writing summaries of the stories I would read, I took time to think about what the story was really about."*

In contrast to description of reading and writing in school, two students mentioned the role of reading in coping with unpleasant realities. Mark writes, *"I was at a stand still, so reading fiction books became my escape. This was my forte. I was hero, villa[i]n; I was in control!"* Sally describes using reading and writing to achieve a feeling of happiness. She wrote the following:

> *A feeling of happiness and love was important to me. I, especially enjoyed reading books with a family. I would wish that I had my mother and father living together in one home. Although, my family life was the exact opposite. . . . Reading and writing became a part of my healing process from my parents divorce. . . . I know I can never forget this lesson of my first schooling because it was a time of great change and learning.*

John's paper stands out among this collection, expressing a strong individual sense of the effect of reading and power of writing. He provided a detailed memory of reading a novel in high school, conveying the intense impressions left by the experience. In this lengthy (four paragraphs) discussion of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, John wrote the following:

> *I found it amusing but yet stressful to read about Lennie and his thoughts. . . .I was really touched by George and his loyalty to Lennie despite all the grief and mishap Lennie had caused the two of them. . . . The knowledge I got of the history of the writer, and the influences in his life that inspired his writing fascinated me more. . . This being the only novel I really took interest in, I do not have too many reading experiences.* Of Mice and Men *is not considered one of the most highly acclaimed novels, but yet it had a large impression on me. It made me see friendship and humans in a different manner.*

This paper contrasted noticeably from others in terms of the student's positive experience with reading, containing such detail about a particular reading experience. He also mentions that reading made him see life in a different way, quite a strong point in comparison to the other papers. It should be noted here that John went to a local private high school.

References to the Meaningfulness of Writing

Description of students' sense of the personal meaning of writing falls into extremes–those for whom it is an assignment, a grade, and those for whom it has either strong communicative or therapeutic purposes.

Adela only seems to remember writing in relation to grades. She wrote, *"As for writing I could say I wasn't doing good. I never did. In high school I passed with c's and I passed by the skin of my teeth sometimes. That brought me down alot."*

Angela, who wrote very little (fewer than 150 words), described both a yearning and a confusion of feelings about the meaningfulness of writing. She was the only one to refer to writing as an escape.

> *Writing to me is sort of an escape in to another world, there's only a few problems for me I have trouble expressing what I feel on paper, also I always draw a blank. When I do write, I always have everything mixed up and don't proportion it correctly. I never had to write anything important before in my life. If I could I would like to learn more about writing.*

Two students expressed the communicative purpose of writing. Lucas wrote, *"By the end of third grade I knew how to write and read almost perfect. I could write a letter to someone and was able to communicate with that person with out any problem."* John again communicates a strong sense of purpose. In three well-developed paragraphs, he discusses the experience of writing a letter to a congressman. He quotes specific sentences he remembers from the letter. The following is a portion of John's paper:

> *My memory of my first experiences of actually writing goes back into my elementary years. I remember that in fourth grade I wrote a letter to Pete Domenici about our problem with pollution. I wanted this letter to be perfect in every aspect. Everything from punctuation to spelling. In my mind I felt that I had to send a perfect letter in order to get any sort of response. Although I was only in the fourth grade my letter needed to sound as though someone very educated sent the message.*

He goes on to explain how the teacher had emphasized the power of writing, and the importance of word choice and attitude. He writes:

> *She explained a situation. . . . She wrote a letter that expressed her feelings about the situation in a very agressive and firm manner. She explained that by*

> *her choice of words and attitude in the letter along with her knowing what she was talking about by backing her statements up with facts, she received the response she wanted. . . . She went on to explain that through out our whole lives we are going to be writing, so if we take the time to prepare and focus on what we are going to write we will have better results.*
>
> *For two nights straight I worked on my letter. . . . My end result turned out a three page letter that proved to myself that I could be a voice in this world. All I need to do is write. What would of completed this writing experience is if my passion for the perfect paper would of carried on into my high school years.*

Again John's educational experiences have given him stronger skills than many of the other students had. He describes his experiences in more detail than other writers and seems to be in more control of what he communicates. He is carefully explaining and supporting a conventional academic point: writing is important. An interesting aspect of this writing is that his experience seems to be a result of careful instruction. John uses exact reasons, perhaps words of the teacher, to explain the power of writing. However, the last sentence raises questions when he admits that the motivation for writing was short-lived, a point that will come up in the next paper when he begins to discuss his ambivalence about reading.

In the context of what John does with this subject in the next assignment, I have questions about the difference between instruction and discovery. (John was given the concept of meaningfulness by his teacher.) How is learning different when a teacher powerfully conveys the idea of a sense of purpose, and when a student individually discovers a personal sense of meaning/purpose in writing?

In a very different way, other students describe experiences of discovering the personal satisfaction and meaning of writing that seem to be personal rather than academic experiences. These experiences are connected to an individual's using writing to deal with life situations. Sally, Sharon, and Isabella describe discovering the use of writing to deal with life experiences. Sally wrote, *"Focusing on learning was hard for me at first until I learned that I could express my feelings on paper which became my salvation."* Sharon, who had to do chores before reading, also has strong feelings about the value of writing. She described her experience of keeping a diary.

> *My writing experiences have also been when I was young I liked keeping a diary. I like putting my feelings down on paper. When I write I am able to sort out my thoughts, especially when I am confused and don't know what to do. My diary became my closest friend. It never judged me, it never left me for another friend it was always dear to me. I could write anything I wanted in it and it would never tell my secrets or my hurts. . . . Even now I keep a journal and put all my thoughts in it. My secrets, my dreams, and my pain. I guess it still is the best writing experience I ever had.*

After describing the effect of her father's verbal abuse, Isabella described both the battle and the therapeutic value of writing she discovered when she returned to school as an adult. Isabella's directness in class also comes through in her writing.

> *If I could just put the words out they just seemed to come out of my heart and soul. This was when I was about 27 years old. The reason I started to write was so that I could get the pain of my past out. This was not all fun, I fought the writing as much as I possible could. The only problem with this was that it got much harder to pick up the pen and start to write once I put it down. The writing I did was on the history of my past, why I drank and drugged. The pain of my childhood was the reason that I used the drugs. When I had to start to write the pain that I had in side, the pain came to the top. The pen had to become my best friend. The things that started to get in the way was when the pain got really hard I had to stop writing. I really wanted to keep writing, but*

> *the pain had just got to painful. While I was in school in the fall of 1993, I did a lot of writing I was able to get to the bottom of a lot of my problem. The only thing that I can remember is today my life is much better.*

In these first drafts, the wide range of perspectives on what reading and writing mean begins to be seen. These activities are associated only with school for some, while others have used them to meet more personal needs.

An Observation about Confidence and Authority

I have often thought that a sense of the meaningfulness, a sense of the purpose of writing was at the source of motivation. However, in looking at these drafts, I found that confidence and an assertive attitude toward learning seem to affect students' learning as equally profoundly as their sense of purpose. This confidence or assertiveness was more observable in this assignment in the writings done by male students. Four of the papers (Kass's, Angela's, Adela's, and Dorothy's), all written by women, leave the reader with discouraged feelings about the struggle of writing. As earlier noted, Angela is confused. She writes, *"I used to set very high goals for myself, and when I found out that I couldn't do the work I became very disencourge in school."* Kass writes, *"I've always had problems with writing about things, it could be anything and I could draw a blank in my mind."* Dorothy writes, *"When I have to write I don't feel confident in doing it."* Adela, discouraged by her Cs, writes, *"that was disappointing to me, but I passed. That's not the way I think it should be with me. I should be able to do a good paper."* The discouragement expressed in these papers lies in the writers' feelings that there is no solution to the situation.

In a slightly different tone, three women's papers (Isabella's, Sally's, and Lynne's) describe frustration, yet end on a positive note. Connie, who recalls such positive experiences with reading, writes about the difficulty of writing:

> *I don't remember deriving pleasure nearly so quickly from writing words on paper as from reading other writers' words on a page. Writing*

> *requires confidence in one's own thoughts and opinions, and it requires patience in the physical activity to write those thoughts down. I found myself still do, in fact, thinking faster than I write or type, so often my writing is not free flowing or coherent. I longed for the ability to write with sophistication, but so that others might enjoy what I wrote as much as I enjoy reading other's works.*

Note Connie's reference to the importance of confidence.

In looking at the class papers as a whole, I saw a general pattern related to confidence and assertiveness that reflected a possible gender difference. None of the men's papers reflected a discouraged feeling like the women's just mentioned. Two papers that illustrate the general pattern are Carmela's and Thomas's. It is impossible to draw conclusions, but I think the difference in the way these two writers describe situations deserves consideration. Carmela gave a lengthy description of the writing class that she failed because she did not ask questions. She wrote,

> *When I was in the seventh grade I took a creative writing class because I knew that I was not very good at writing stories. I thought that if I took the class I would learn to write, but I was wrong. The creative writing class was for students who knew how to write stories. The class was graded on writing stories in rough draft and then in final draft. I failed the class because I did not know how to begin writing a story with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. I was not sure rather I had missed learning the format of an essay, or rather I had never taught the format at all. So, I went through the whole class never doing any of the work. I had received the grade that I had deserved for the work that I did not do. I was very upset for myself for receiving a failing grade that I desserved for not trying. I received a failing grade for wanting to learn something that I knew that I could do, but I did not know how to ask for help. After failing the creative writing class, I was very careful not to take*

> *classes that envolved writing other than taking notes in class. . . . I failed the class myself by not asking the teacher to help me with what I did not understand.*

Carmela's situations contrasts with Thomas's situation. He describes getting back his report on killer whales:

> *I got the result back. I was a little bit disappointed with the grade that I had recieved. It was a B-. After reading the comments and asking the teacher why I had gotten a B- I learned that there was a few minor details that I had left out which caused my grade to be lowered. From that day forward I knew the ingredients it takes to write a good paper.*

The assertiveness that Thomas seemed to create from his experience made for positive school experiences, while Carmela's discouragement had serious consequences for several years in terms of her attitude toward writing and school in general. Carmela's recent school experiences and her attitude in this class and in the last paper reflected assertiveness and a growing confidence. However, she is an older student who has owned her own successful business and thus brings a positive sense of self into the school situation. I would not generalize from only two examples, but these papers illustrate a difference I observed in other cases.

Other male students wrote with a confidence that was not found in the women's papers. An example of this strong male sense of confidence was noted earlier in John's paper. John's writing experience in the fourth grade reflects the confidence that he *"could be a voice in this world."* And Mark, who has just returned to school after 30 years, writes, *"Now, after many years, I've come to the realization that with schooling, again, I could write a book still better, write a novel that isn't fiction."*

Elito and Lucas, the two male students from other countries, described challenges in learning but also the confidence to face these challenges. Lucas writes:

> *Something I did not think about was the fact that reading and writing was going to be a big problem for me because in this country they did*

> *not spoke spanish. I did not worry about it, but I thought it was something I could eventually learn.*

Whether the women are comfortable expressing their insecurities or whether experiences shape their perceptions differently is difficult to say. Women are equally competent and articulate in class, so I had not noticed this difference in attitude until I studied these papers. It was not until I had looked more closely–qualitatively for the feelings expressed, and quantitatively for the number of papers falling into categories–that I discovered the differences expressed in assertiveness/confidence.

Preparing the Final Draft of Paper #1

Observing where and how learning takes place in the course involves noting what occurs between the first and final draft and the changes that can be seen in the papers. In the case of this first paper several activities transpired between the first draft and the final. First, students brought their draft to class and did the individual work sheets. Then the group read and discussed each paper, and each individual filled out the group work sheet. At the end of that class, I collected the drafts and work sheets, and commented on the drafts.

I returned the drafts at the next class session and put "A Checklist for Paper #1" on the board. I talked about introductions and lead-ins to a subject and what the word "history" in the question means, describing more than one incident.

Next I talked about specificity in writing and read from Jimmy Santiago Baca's Working in the Dark. Students enjoy hearing literature or essays read aloud. Oral sharing seems to give a stronger sense or meaning to text, to what we are doing. Students were very attentive to Baca's work, I think, because of its honesty and strong emotional sense. Because Jimmy Santiago Baca lives in the Southwest, students have some connection and interest in his experience. He describes his bad experiences with school, his life on the street, and his personal discovery of the meaning of reading and writing. Because Baca is open about his history as an addict and convict, most students do not exactly identify with him, but they are touched by his experiences and his honesty. In the pages I read, Baca describes discovering reading and writing:

> I always had thought reading a waste of time, that nothing could be gained by it. Only by action, by moving out into the world and confronting and challenging the obstacles, could one learn anything worth knowing. . . .
>
> Days later, with a stub pencil I whittled sharp with my teeth, I propped a Red Chief notebook on my knees and wrote my first words. (6)

Students heard Baca's honesty and the detail of his description. After this model, I shared sections from students' first drafts. Looking at school situations, I read John's last paragraph about hidden meanings in literature and Carmela's about not asking questions in class. Then I read Isabella's and Sally's papers on the healing or therapeutic effects of writing and reading, and I read Sharon's paper referring to attitudes about reading, laziness, and chores. The papers I chose to read aloud were varied, but each had honesty and raised questions. Hearing the writing of classmates provided a range of voices and style that was broader than the texts of professional writers. I wanted students to use immediately the "energy" or inspiration of what they had heard to write. I wrote on the board "Your attitudes and feelings about reading and writing" and asked students to free-write on the topic. Students wrote intensely for 15 minutes, never checking the clock. They then read aloud what they had written (referred to later).

A Look at the Final Draft of Paper #1

My purposes with this assignment were twofold: for students to experience writing as a means of exploring/discussing a subject through recall and reflection, and to experience writing as communication through consideration of the readers' needs by introducing and developing the topic. These goals are not separate but interconnected, and classroom and individual activities work simultaneously to encourage the processes. I will focus on three aspects of the class that I think contributed to changes in the writing between the first and final drafts of this paper. These are understanding expectations of audience and form, small group and classroom discussion, and emphasis placed on honest writing about the subject.

Looking at the differences between the first and final drafts, I see major changes: awareness of general form (introductions and conclusions), use of development (details and explanations), and the addition of new ideas. The classroom activities emphasize the social nature of the writing process, a conversation among members of a community. Individuals develop communication skills as well as practice thinking and questioning critically. I cannot say that these revisions are the result of any particular activity, but noting them strengthens my observation that activities such as reading aloud, discussing ideas and papers in small groups, and doing varied free-writing in class and in journals contribute to the quality of writing and the quality of experience of writing. Students need to know what it means to explore an idea, to work with memory, and to interpret experience. They need exposure to a variety of voices. A complementarity can exist between the expectations of formal papers and the spontaneity of free-writing. Students have heard others' papers and discussed the subject, preparing to take their own ideas further, to remember more detail, and to explain more carefully. In the final draft students had an opportunity to use what they had learned in class about communication and what they had discovered in terms of content.

Understanding Expectations of Audience and Form

What I want to look for here are indications of the manner in which classroom activities having to do with form affect students' writing and their perception of writing. What I mean by "form" in this context is introduction of the subject, presentation of a history with developed details, and conclusion of the discussion, all of which had been encouraged in class. Form is worked with as it relates to communication behavior: How does one begin to tell/write about a subject? What does the listener/reader need to know? How are talking and writing about experiences different? I am looking at both exploration of the topic and quality of the communication of the topic.

Teachers and researchers debate the role of form in the teaching of writing. While those focused on academic writing emphasize the importance of form, those concerned with writing as exploration and discovery question whether form inhibits exploration. I want to look at indications of the effects of discussion/work with form.

Working with both informal and formal writing enables students to develop skills varying from generating and exploring ideas to shaping these ideas for the reader. When students work with form —the concepts of lead-in or introductory sentences or paragraphs, general organization, and conclusions—they are using memory and experience to generate ideas, interpret situations and create meaning for the reader. Creating meaning for the reader cannot always be distinguished from creating meaning for the self, especially at this level of writing. Form, if understood as an aspect of communication, can work to develop content. The writer recognizes that a two-sentence paragraph does not usually provide sufficient detail for the reader to understand what is described. The writer reaches for more content through association and memory.

I must note that instruction is tricky here. If a student has not been able to get ideas on paper, words like "introduction," "development," and "conclusion" can be inhibiting, as I will illustrate. Mike Rose discusses this situation in his article, "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language" (1980). Writing a second draft pushes students to trust the honesty of what they have experienced, recall the details of their experiences, and communicate experiences to others.

(Some students made significant changes in their final draft.) In many cases, the students' final Paper #1 reflected a greater awareness of the more traditional lead-in, introducing the reader to the subject. Thomas, John, and Lynne added paragraph-long introductions to what they had written in the first draft. Elito added a one-sentence lead-in. Carmela, Dorothy, Connie, and Lucas had introductions in their first drafts and did not change the final. Mark, Sally, Isabella, and Angela leapt right into the description of a particular situation just as they had in the first draft. Thomas's paper took a dramatic leap from a one-paragraph, handwritten first draft to a final draft that had paragraphs and an introduction and conclusion. Connie's final paper was focused on a particular experience rather than the vague social commentary she had done in the first draft.

In terms of understanding the needs of the reader and explaining/describing more completely, several final papers showed significant improvement. An example of this development is the comparison between a section from Isabella's draft of Paper #1 and her final work. In the first draft she writes:

> *This is when my dad started to tell me I was stupid and could not do any thing right. As a child I grow up believing this for many years. I was so afraid to read that I even forgot how to spell my last name in the third grade. Today I still have that door in my head, yet I'm thinking really hard to open that and keep it open.*

In Isabella's final draft, she separates experiences into paragraphs and explains each more completely. The following is from Isabella's final Paper #1:

> *This is where the block started. The door went up into my head and I just stopped reading. All the words that I had learned were gone. The mental abuse started when my dad would tell me, "You are so stupid and you will never amount to anything. You can't do anything right." As a child, I grew up believing I was stupid. To be a young child and have nothing but negative thing told to me has created a lot of scars.*
>
> *I was so afraid to read that I even forgot how to spell my last name in the third grade. The teacher told us to write out our first and last name on our homework. After I turned in my paper I learned I did not know how to spell my last name. I would just scribbled letter[s] that looked like my last name (Galgs) to me. The teacher asked me, "Why don't you know how to spell your last name?" I drew a blank. I did not know what to tell her. The girl sitting next to me said, "I will teach her how to spell her last name." My face turned red with embarrassment to have someone else teach me how to spell my last name. The shame just made that door in my head more solid and harder to tear down. I have carried this shame for many years.*
>
> *Today I still have that door. I believe the door was put there to protect me from those voices in my head. "You're stupid, your're ugly, you're never going to amount to anything." The voice I was hearing was my father.*

While the changes in Isabella's paper seem to come from a sense of how to tell the story more completely, we can't really know what the writer was thinking when these changes were being made. Was the writer doing it for herself or was the writer thinking about the reader?

Several other final papers contained well-developed specific scenes rather than vague statements. Do I explain this development of the text as a result of the use of writing to explore and discover, or as greater awareness of audience and the readers' need for more detail? Another example of this kind of change/development occurred in Elito's paper, when he changed one sentence from the first draft–*Learning the pronunciation of the letters was hard.*–into the following paragraph:

> *My first experience was learning the vowels, and I liked every picture that the book had for every letter. It was fascinate seen a church, a plane, on elephant, etc. I never knew that church started with the letter I. (that is in Spanish for iglesia) The pictures had all kind of colors red, blue, yellow, etc. and they were draw in a funny way. I found the book very interesting and fun.*

This paragraph provides more information about Elito's perception of learning as well as his sensitivity to the reader, as indicated by his translation of a word in Spanish.

Often the changes reflect a shift in voice or a change in genre. The writer is controlling the presentation of the topic in the text. Sharon transformed her first draft, which reflected a searching process, to a story format. Her first draft had many references to the process of trying to remember, such as the following: *I can't seem to remember . . . ; As I search my childhood I remember doing some reading.;* and *As I try to search my memory while I was growing up.*

Her final draft is a more traditional story, which starts with *We just got home from school, my brothers are putting their backpacks at the front door as we enter the house.* She then goes on to describe how she sits down to read in *a comfortable brown chair.* What was one sentence in her first draft referring to "*someone getting angry*" about her reading becomes the following paragaph:

> *Minutes turned into an hour. While I was reading my book I hear someone driving up the driveway. I think nothing of it, I just continue to*

> *read my book. My oldest brother walks through the front door. Right away he starts yelling "why is this house a mess?" He didn't give me a chance to explain. As I looked into his eyes, they were full of anger. He is yelling "you are so lazy." He goes to the kitchen and finds dirty dishes. He goes through out the house finding this and that not done.*

When Sharon gave me this paper, she said that she had been shaking when she wrote it because the memories were so painful. She said, "He hit me and not just once." Sharon did not, however, put that detail in the paper. As a teacher, I sometimes feel hesitant about pushing a student to remember and to write more about painful subjects.

In contrast to these students who have used expectation of form and awareness of communication to develop ideas and provide details, some students are intimidated by the language of form and the expectations of school writing. Susan wrote the following:

> *Everytime I had to write a journal or a book report, I always had trouble because I felt that I wan't a good enough speller. . . . I always felt embarssed of my hand writing and spelling. The most thing that I feared was not makeing sense on any of my papers. . . .I really had a terrible time starting the introduction and ending the conclusion.*

I recognize in this last sentence a familiar sound. This description of Susan's fears indicates that when a student has not been able to get honest words or ideas on paper, talk of form can create a writing block. While an understanding of expectations can help some students, not comprehending expectations of form can seriously inhibit others. Students who have trouble writing often focus on the expectations of form before they ever get a word on paper. The fears about what others will think of her ideas, of her spelling, of her handwriting, and of her ability to communicate are major obstacles for Susan. I used this information most consciously in terms of the comments that I wrote on individual papers. I knew when to use terminology and when to hold off using terminology that might intimidate.

The insights that these writings provided furthered my understanding of the relationship between invention and audience. The social/communicative nature of writing is critical to the generation and development of content. When the class shared papers, students understood better what readers wanted and needed to know. Whereas a more experienced writer may use form to understand the need for specific support or development, these students could understand the concept better from the social experience of sharing stories and writing.

Effects of Small-Group and Classroom Discussions

Understanding writing as a social as well as individual process, I want to note here specific observations that may indicate how participating in discussions and hearing other student papers may affect student writing. While an instructor can comment on what is written in a draft, she cannot know or comment on experiences or ideas that have been left out. When students discuss ideas and share papers, memories are often triggered. Students recall situations that they then write about. I surveyed these papers for traces of classroom discussion, threads of themes the class had talked about. I looked at the difference between the first draft and the final paper to see linkages, associations with other papers, or ideas expressed in class. The honesty and the emphasis on recreating stories and details was an obvious result of this sharing. In the final draft of this paper, some students were more comfortable expressing negative feelings about school, reading, and writing, and the writing in general had more detailed stories.

I want to look at two examples that, I think, reflect experiences (memories) which appear to have been triggered by listening to other students' experiences. These examples surfaced themes that continued to appear in student writing throughout the semester: 1) readings have hidden meanings, and 2) writing is a form of healing.

Theme I: Readings Have Hidden Meanings

The first of these shows an association between John's paper and Thomas's final paper. In the first draft John ended his paper with what I thought was an interesting paragraph, one that raised questions and provoked thinking. I read this paragraph to the class.

> *In conclusion, although I have not really focused or taken interest in reading and writing, I have had some pretty good experiences. I am not able to interpret or understand hidden messages in other authors writings or how to write my own hidden messages, but I have gotten to read and write to my own satisfaction.*

This is not the first time that I had heard students express this idea that literature is writing with hidden meanings which the teacher must explain. I was curious. After reading John's conclusion, I asked the class if other students had experienced anything similar, and many shared stories. It seemed literature had often been presented as having interpretations that students could only get with the help of the teacher. This idea did not seem to have been questioned previously. Teachers have the knowledge and are the authorities on the meaning of what is read in class. Thomas perhaps was reminded in this discussion of his experiences and thus added a section to his final draft. He concluded his final paper with the following paragraph, which had not been in the draft:

> *My most recent experience came upon me around a year ago when my twelfth grade english teacher gave an assignment to read the stories of "Pinnochio" and "The Wizard of Oz". The assignment was to find the*

> *hidden meanings and translate them to paper. I went to the public library, checked out these books, and read long than what I had ever thought that I would. This was the hardest project that I had ever experienced. I even had to read "The Wizard of Oz" twice before I got the true meaning of the story. This experience made me learn how to read beyond the story line and look further to find out the theme of a story so I know what its really based on.*

Students are both fascinated and intimidated by the idea of hidden messages, hidden meanings in literature. Thomas sounds confident, challenged by the learning situation. His memory/experience was different but probable triggered by John's paper and the class discussion. Other students' journal entries later in the semester (Carmela's and Sally's) indicated that this topic was significant and deserved further thought. These will be discussed.

Theme II: Writing Can Be Healing

Another example of a new topic being incorporated into a paper after students shared the first draft can be seen in Connie's final paper. After hearing portions of both Isabella's and Sally's papers and participating in the discussion of "writing as healing," Connie added the following section to her paper.

> *Most recently, I have experienced letter writing as cathartic. I had anger so deep towards the way I was being treated by my husband, that I literally became tongue-tied. When I finally left him, I found that I could not talk to him to express my feelings, so I wrote reams of pages to him. I have found that writing to my friends is the easiest way to explain why I left my husband.*

Connie, Isabella, and Sally were moved by the common experience of writing and reading being therapeutic expressed in Isabella's and Sally's paper. The way in which writing can heal through providing an opportunity to express and work through past experiences was further explored in several second papers (Isabella's and Sally's) as well as future free-writes (Marcos's, Mark's) and journals (Connie's), as will be discussed.

The current idea of the social construction of meaning can be observed in this study of the themes discussed and the comparison of drafts. I am always interested in the spontaneous first writings, which have not been colored by group process, in contrast to the second draft, which had been influenced by the specific discussions in the classroom. In observing and commenting on the threads of discussion that appear in student writing, I am not making any cause/effect statements. However, in understanding writing as a collaborative activity, we can benefit from noting specific places where interaction affects content. These examples are not particularly subtle but reflect obvious cases where memory is triggered by another's experience to remember something that was not recalled when the first draft was written in isolation. The effects of discussion in terms of content and attitudes expressed are myriad and take varied form in each writing. Some students used the word "healing" to describe their experiences with writing. This personal as contrasted to academic use of writing leads into my next discussion of papers that reflect the use of writing to work with problems, in this case the problem of school, of reading and writing.

Encouragement of Honest Writing

The expressionist line of composition theory (Macrorie, Murray, Elbow) has strongly influenced my thinking about key aspects of this writing course. Creating an environment where students use language as a means of getting in touch with the self is basic, I think, to developing the use of language for exploration, critical thinking, and problem solving. In order to create this environment, I have found the need initially to provide students with writing that is not typically academic but that is personal and direct/honest, writing that conveys individual experience. Hearing texts as well as hearing the writings of other students sets the stage for using honest or "real" language to express and work with experiences.

I think hearing Jimmy Santiago Baca's feelings about reading and writing and his detailed descriptions inspired students to write in a more straightforward way about experiences on a subject that they had not written about before. For many students, the discussion, which was negative at times, of experiences, feelings, and attitudes around school and learning was an unexpected aspect of this assignment and surrounding discussions. Students clearly have been told since the beginning of their education how important reading and writing are, which has two effects: 1) students hesitate to admit that they don't like to read and write, especially in school situations, and 2) they feel guilty/ashamed of the fact that reading and writing do not have good associations or meaning for them. Students needed to be given a kind of freedom to look at these experiences as they were/are rather than as they ideally are.

This assignment brought strong reactions to the surface for many students. The momentum of it encouraged me to take the topic further in a slightly different direction in the second assignment. Journal assignments, comments in formal paper, and general comments to me by several students indicated that hearing others discuss the reality of reading and writing in their lives opened everyone up, as if the class sighed and then began to really tell what happened. Students who had had painful or difficult school experiences seemed to benefit the most.

Sometimes when students do not trust the value of their experiences or what they have to say, their writing becomes vague, general, disconnected from their experience. In her first draft, Adela's writing lacked description of specific situations, experiences, or feelings. However, the final draft provided an opportunity for Adela to express more of her feelings, as the following paragraphs shows:

> *These experiences have affected especially my attitudes toward writing. I feel that writing is maybe not my thing to do, yet it so very damn important in today's world and especially my future. I don't like the idea of not being able to write as good as others do, because anyone can if only... I don't know? I'm already to the point where I just hate this all together and I can't concentrate on doing my homework for this class. I feel as if I must give up because no one seems to understand where I'm coming from. I guess I shouldn't feel this way because I know I can do it, I just need a little help on my errors....*
>
> *...I didn't like reading so that's why my parents read to me so much. But as time went on, I had no choice but to read. I sometimes like it, if only if it seemed interesting to me. Otherwise I wasn't interested in reading. And if I read it, I just read it, that's all. I think in my life time I've only read at least six books and I know that's not enough to be liking to read. I know that it does take a lot of time to read a book, but you have to want to. It's up to you too!*

This passage illustrates Adela's way of both expressing feelings and working with attitudes. The writing has an honesty. She lets out her frustration but also talks to herself about what she believes she must do. She understands that the motivation must be there. Adela was one of the more fragile students in the early part of the semester. She missed a lot of class, got sick, had family emergencies. Again and again in Adela's writing, I saw the dilemma of survival, being forced to read: "I had no choice but to read." While she was disinterested, she was also writing, *"I shouldn't feel this way"* and thinking she should be interested but writing, *"You have to want it."* Adela's honesty reflects her use of language to understand her situation, to work with goals and think about change.

This assignment gave me some understanding of the attitudes of individual students. While some were more open about their feelings, others by an absence of "talk" caused me concern. An interesting comparison can be made between Adela's writing and Susan's writing. Susan was a student like Adela who was fragile from the beginning. She had been in my reading lab several semesters before, and I sensed she was in school because it was expected of her, not because she chose to be. Susan did not turn in a first draft of this paper. Her final draft of Paper #1 reflected the conflicts she felt. Many of her feelings about reading and writing seem to be connected to a sense of being less than others in the school environment. She wrote the following about her experiences: *As I remember I hated to write more than I did to read. It was the most terrible thing for me to do.*

Susan attempts to be more optimistics about her current attitude in the following section:

> *Now today I feel better about reading and writing. I don't fear anymore because I have gotten comfortable with the fact the reading and writing is fun. I feel that it's fun because writing journals you get to express all your opinions and feelings. As for writing papers and essays it's a good learning experience. Reading is also fun because I get to read many things that intrest me, such as poems and love stories. My attitude changed because I feel I got over my fears and that I can see the true realitys of reading and writing.*

I believe that Susan is writing what she wants to experience here rather than what she is experiencing. Looking back now at Susan's work, I wish she had been able to be more honest at this early point. Words like "boring" and "fun" in her journal and papers all semester seem to mask more specific, possibly more "honest," reactions to situations. Maybe it is a vocabulary problem. These words define her realities, and she doesn't choose to break out of them.

Looking back, I find it valuable to compare Adela and Susan, who were both fragile, disinterested, and pressured from others to be in school. Adela's honesty perhaps helped her use language to work with this situation whereas Susan seemed trapped in a language that did not allow her to express true feelings. If we can learn something here, it is that students need to be able to use language to get in touch with what they are experiencing in order to work with that experience, to problem solve the situation and make changes.

Another student who voiced strong feelings about her experiences was Angela. Her first paper included her earlier description of the frustration of trying to learn, being tested, and not understanding why reading and writing were so difficult. Then in the final paper, she poignantly adds a descriptive scene at the kitchen table:

> *She {mother} would help me pronounce the words over and over,while my brother in the background would say the words correctly. That drove me up the wall. He was learning more than I was, and he was younger. I started to cry. I yelled at the top of my lungs, "I can't read: and I threw the book across the kitchen table breaking a vase. I couldn't understand why my brother could learn and I couldn't.*
>
> *...I wanted to be like my brother and friends to learn quickly and get good grades. I practically gave up, but I never did. I just didn't try as hard, how funny, I would pass, not wiht "A's" or "B's", but with "C's" and "D's".*

This scene is a key memory for Angela, and she chooses in her second paper to start with this memory and explore further the pain of difference, how could learning be so easy for her brother and so difficult for her. The detail used to recreate this scene triggers unresolved feelings. Angela's paper then unexpectantly goes in another direction, into a form of fantasy, which is difficult to interpret.

> *When I was fourteen, I started writing in a diary. It was like an escape into another world, especially when I was mad. I would go across the river and up into the mountain and open up my diary. How I would imagine a world of peace. On half of the world I would see a sunny day with a Pegasus flying, on the other side I would see a black cloud. Everytime I would see the flying horse, I wanted him to land, and take me far away from everything.*
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> *One day I got so mad that "Charlie" landed on the mountain, asking me if I wanted a ride. I hopped on and flew into the sky. What a joy entered my heart as we were flying. I could see the sparkling clear water that ran threw the fields of green grass and the forest of tall trees. "Charlie" made me see how beautiful the world can be. "Charlie" told me never to lose sight of the clear water that runs threw me. Then, we landed on the mountain. "Charlie" flew further and further away the same with the black cloud.*
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> *This is when writing became part of me. Sometimes, it's hard for me to find "Charlie". When "Charlie" does come alive, he gets into my veins, and I can't stop writing. I'm ashamed of what Charlie can make me write. I feel people will get offended and criticize us, and that he will leave me forever.*

I did not at the time know what to think of this piece of writing, and looking at it now, I am no clearer. Angela came to my office several times to chat. She kept asking if I knew her brother. I realized who he was and that I had had him as a student several years ago. I asked her about "Charlie." She smiled and said maybe she would tell me sometime. She never did.

This writing reflects, I think, a leap from pain to fantasy, although I can not separate fantasy from reality here. Does Angela keep a diary? Does writing there become a part of her? This fantasy may indicate that honesty may be expressed more easily for some individuals through imaginative devices. The students had no models for such a genre, so the source of Angela's inspiration or form is not clear.

How Do Students Decide What to Include in the Final Paper?

As previously mentioned, on the day I returned the first draft students did a free-writing. Students had also been doing corresponding thematic journal assignments since the semester began. I commented in my January field notes that while "Xeroxing all these final drafts of Paper #1 and comments on attitudes toward reading and writing, I pick up an overall sense of writing that is different in the free-writing than in the methodical approach of formal papers. The writing is better in free-writing." What I meant by better writing is not the formal structure but the content that communicates the voice of the writer and tells something specific about a particular situation.

The fact that more specific writing often occurs in the journal or in class free-writes is an observation other teachers I work with have also made. We are concerned that what gets written in free-writes does not get included in formal papers. Is the problem integrating this material? How do students decide what to include and what to eliminate when putting together a paper? Because free-writing often releases new ideas, raises questions, creates controvery, and eludes simple answers, students may not know how to integrate the ideas that come up. Free-writing is then a nice exercise, but not a useful writing tool for generating and developing ideas.

In comparing some of the free-writings done in class and in journals to the more formal papers, I question why portions of the free-writing were not integrated into the paper. Perhaps a kind of reductionist thinking comes with the idea of "doing a paper": stay with a main idea; don't stray. Or, I wonder whether the issue is one of form: when students think of writing a formal paper, they concentrate on ideas, not specifics; they think generally, not in detail. Or I wonder whether it is one of culture: students are not always comfortable bringing culture from home into the classroom, putting it on paper. I don't have comments from students about these choices; therefore, I can only note observations and raise questions.

Comparing free-writing and formal writing to note these differences, I have chosen to look more closely at situations where some students consciously chose not to bring family or their community into their formal writing. Because the stimulus for this paper was reading related to culture and education, the absence of this subject in the majority of the papers seems most obvious in the data. This situation warrants attention for another reason. When teachers work with narrative topics, we need to understand how students may perceive writing about family or culture.

A look at what was excluded in a final draft may provide insights about individuals' choices in writing about personal and community situations. An out-of-class situation gave me information that I would not have had just reading the papers. A teacher who had been Sharon's instructor last semester, Shuli Lamden, was visiting with Sharon in the hallway and mentioned the assignment about experiences with reading and writing. Sharon commented to Shuli that her group in her English class had shared experiences where reading was not supported by the family and community lifestyle. She said, "Yes, and another student (Kass) also said that her community did not value reading." After hearing this story, I went back and read again Kass's paper, which had seemed vague, perhaps caught between what she thought was expected and what she had experienced. Her writing did not reflect what she had said to Sharon about community attitudes in class discussion. The following is from her paper:

> *I have had many experience with reading and writing. I grew up in a community where reading was an important part of communicating. In grade school and high school I did a lot of reading, but the writing never came as easily to me as it did to other people. I've always had problems with writing about things, it could be anything and I would draw a blank in my mind. With reading it's easy because in order to understand how to do anything, or just learning about what is going on around you, a person has to read.*

At this point in the semester, Kass did not write about specific situations she had experienced. Her writing was general, vague. I wonder if a student "draws a blank," has no specific stories to tell when the values and expectations of home and school are in conflict. After the classroom discussion, she wrote in a free-writing the following, which expresses a conflict between reading and doing, a conflict similar to Sharon's:

> *With reading I have problems because I usually start reading something and my mind wanders to different things, like what I have to do later or what needs to be done such as housework, cooking or just anything. so in a sense I do like to read its just that other things have to be done before I read.*

When academic values differ from those values experienced at home or in the community, a student may not be comfortable describing experiences. In this case the community may value and promote reading and education, but at the same time expect individuals to put other responsabilities before reading. In her final paper, Kass wrote, *"I've always enjoyed reading. I have always been able to pick up a book or magazine and read it cover to cover."* She makes no reference to the conflict between "doing" and "reading" that comes up in the free-writing; she also left out the sentence about reading being important to her community. Thus, the paper presents a simplistic view of experiences and attitudes around reading rather than one that presents a possible conflict of values. Kass had trouble with the course because she missed many classes because of responsibilities at her pueblo.

When attitudes toward reading and writing were discussed in class, several students admitted: "You never tell the teacher you don't like to read or that your family/ community does not encourage reading" "Reading is important for everyone to do" "You are supposed to like reading." The difficulty of writing honestly about one's family or community values must be considered when we make judgments about vague, general, or simplistic writing.

Another situation where interesting specifics from a free-writing were not included in a final paper can be seen by looking at Thomas's final paper and the free-writing he did in class. His Paper #1 begins, *"Reading and writing have given me different experiences through out my academic career."* The entire paper is about school: Thomas's good experiences in school. On the other hand, the free-writing that he did in class had some interesting insights into reading and writing in the context of his family and community. When I returned the free-writing he had done in class with the first draft, I suggested that he incorporate the ideas from the free-writing. He completely ignored my suggestion. I am including the free-writing in its entirety because it reflects a voice that only surfaces occasionally in Thomas's writing and not typically in formal papers.

> *The only conflict I have with home life and school life is that I'm the first one in my family to attend a college. because the elders that would teach everything and I would go to with problems of school like aunts & uncles, grandmas & grandpas. The conflict is that they come to me with problems like math, carpentry and automechanics and I don't look up to them like I used to. Its seems that the further I go in school*

> *the less advice I need from the people who taught me what life is all about.*
>
> *My attitude toward reading and writing hasn't always been that great of an attitude. I used to dread the fact that I have to read about something that was assigned to me. A reading assignment usually means that its something that I'm not interested in. Once I started reading books that I was interested in like comics and magazines. After reading about things I liked I learned to accept the fact that reading wasn't a waste of time. I never really liked writing either until a friend of mine needed to know how to set up his set of hydraulics on his car I didn't want to tear a page out of my magazine so I summarized the article for him and helped him out and thats when writing became a whole new experience to me.*

I can not say why Thomas made the choices he did and did not include these ideas, whether it was a matter of logic, the difficulty of integrating this material, or a matter of keeping the personal out of school. I know Thomas's community. He is from a small rural community north of the city where I once lived. In fact, I taught Thomas at a small community school when he was in the second and third grade. I am sensitive to his stance in the big city and the formality of his papers. Throughout the semester, I found his voice to be strong and individualistic although questioning, protective, and critical of his community, as will be seen in the next assignment.

Personal narrative writing may reflect conflicts students feel about the differences between home and school. Bridging these communities may cause students to leave out details and write vaguely in order to handle the conflicts they feel. The academic community somewhat casually labels groups, describes behaviors and attitudes, explains causal relationships, and defines values. Academics do this often without thinking how it might feel from the inside because they so often are talking about the majority or the minority from a different position. Students may not so quickly objectify their families, their communities. They may choose to write papers that are vague and general rather than describe and analyze their family and community. Conflicts between the values of the individual and the community as well as between different communities are challenging for inexperienced writers, especially when students have been encouraged to present papers structured to support a coherent idea or, as they perceive it, a "standard idea."

It is important to note that students often are quite firm about their choices. Group suggestions, as noted on the work sheet, were often ignored. Just as Thomas refused my suggestions, Carmela ignored her group's suggestion that she leave her family out of the paper. If anything, she made the focus on family influences stronger. John's group suggested to him that he leave out the storyline and focus on feelings. His paper was only slightly revised. He added an introduction and kept his storyline just as it was, without mention of his feelings. Decision making is a crucial part of writing, and students need to weigh several possibilities and learn from experience what they as a writer prefer. As an instructor, I need to be aware of the multiple factors affecting these decisions, the writer's personality, gender (at times), sense of self, family, and community. Also a part of this decision-making is the individual's interpretation of the purpose of a narrative assignment. Is it to remember, to share, to release frustration, or to motivate oneself?

Concluding Comments

Narrative writing has often been looked at in terms of linguistic structure, literary style, as well as writers' competence or skills level. This ethnographic research, however, focuses on the context of narrative writing providing insight into a variety of factors affecting individuals' perceptions of what they are doing, not just the understanding they bring to the situation but the understanding that they develop in the context of the semester. First drafts indicated what students brought to the classroom, their understanding of school writing. Changes that occurred between the first and final drafts reflect students growing awreness of classmates as readers as well as their awareness of writing as a way of exploring a subject.

Experiencing classmates as their audience, students developed paragraphs and added introductions and conclusions. Themes surfaced in the class as topics of shared interest. These were **first, the idea of hidden meanings in readings** and **second, the idea of writing as therapy**. Some students began to reflect and think critically, to question situations, to think more about situations in terms of their effects, to reflect on their attitudes about these experiences.

I am interested here in the use of narrative as it contributes individuals' use of language for recall, reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving. The number of students who described problems related to reading and writing indicated the significant nature of this topic. Problem solving occurred in very different ways. Whereas some students analyzed a problem, others simple expressed frustration, and still others focused on the positive, never mentioning conflicts or difficulties. This was the first assignment. Only in the context of the entire semester could I appreciate these writings as the beginnings of a process of critical reflection and problem solving through writing.

The first day of class, students responded to the question “what makes writing good?” in terms of why the process of writing is good for a person. Again, on the questionaire about the first paper, when students were asked what they liked "about the paper," the majority of students responded that they liked expressing feelings and describing experiences (e.g., "I could express how I felt"). Is the process/the activity of writing more important to students than the text they write? Were students evaluating the meaningfulness of this activity? What did they bring to the assignment, and how did they interpret the assignment?

I had several reasons for assigning this first paper. First, the topic was a good warm-up and provides me with information about my students. I wanted to know their individual histories with reading and writing through their written interpretations. I learned that Carmela, Connie, Marcos, and Thomas had strong motivation and positive attitudes, although their histories with reading and writing varied considerably. I learned that Adela, Susan, Angela, Mark, and Lucas have many fears and hesitations around writing. On a basic level, I learned about the family backgrounds of Connie, Carmela, John, Mark, Susan, Adela, Kass, and Sharon. Classroom discussion provided more information and acted as a catalyst that began to involve students in a process of individual discovery and work related to these histories.

A second reason for this assignment was to encourage the use of language for recall, reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving. In which cases or where did students use writing for reflection and problem solving, and what were the factors affecting the way writing was used for reflection and exploration? Narrative reflects the complexity of individuals in the process of making meaning from their experiences. As such, narrative is a factor of individual personality, attitudes toward self, family, and community, and perception of the writing activity/the assignment.

Narrative is close to the personality. Most of these students have had little experience writing, and their work, especially the first paper of the semester, is direct, not controlled or shaped by an understanding of school expectations. Most of the students have not developed literacy/academic goals for the text. As Mark wrote "just getting words on the paper about the subject" is an accomplishment.

Personal styles of expression came out in the writing. Whereas Isabella seemed to relish in revealing the details of her abusive childhood, Thomas did not include details on the subject that did not contribute to his description of learning as a positive experience. Sharon's paper reflected her struggle in the moment to recall buried experiences and write about them. Carmela's paper presents a detailed analysis of her family and school history, describing her interpretation of the effects of these experiences as if she had thought about the subject for some time. Adela's and Angela's papers, like many others, gave vivid pictures of the frustration of learning and school, while Elito's and John's gave positive examples of school learning.

This first assignment was a clear picture of the diversity of students who came together in this class. The degree to which a student choses to write about self, family, and community comes from interpretation of the situation, past school experiences with writing, and personal and community values. Whereas Carmela analyzed in detail her family and school experiences, Kass and Thomas consciously chose not to make references to community and family. Some students (Carmela, Isabella) did not hesitate to blame their families for problems they had in school; others (Elito) left out details that might be critical toward family; and still others (Adela) defended their family's reading habits. The way in which one writes about self, family, and community is affected by personal, family, and social histories.

In looking at these narratives as well as free-writings and journals, I began to discern what I believe are the different approaches students have toward narrative school writing. These may reflect their understanding of the writing process and its purposes. Some students vented anger, while others represented pretty pictures. Did these students perceive the purpose of the assignment differently, or did they have different individual purposes? These purposes may not always be conscious but they affect the choices made in individual narratives, creating very different types of stories. Because these writers are less experienced, less in control of what they are doing, one cannot clearly separate personality here from the writer's purpose or intention. However, following these writers through the next assignment and looking at class discussion and informal writing provided insight into shifts that occurred which indicated changes in the students' approaches to narrative writing, shifts which may reflect changes in their understanding of purpose.

Students' "reading" of the writing assignment is a product in part of past school experiences because writing is typically learned at school. Essays are often taught as exercises in presenting conventional truths and developing them with examples. Several students such as Thomas and John wrote papers with strong positive thesis statements, not questioning the subject or presenting complexity. For example, in this first paper, John presents a strong positive impression of his experiences with reading and writing. He is a skilled writer, and his purpose seemed to be to present the conventional idea of the importance and value of reading for him. Thomas's paper presented a similar thesis, detailing positive school experiences. After classroom discussions, both of these writers raise questions in the next paper about the subject of reading and writing and its role in their lives.

Whether it is personality, past learning experiences, or perception of the situation is hard to say, but other students used the assignment to vent anger and frustration from past experiences. In many ways the students who used the assignment to vent anger and frustration were less conscious of academic expectations and more in touch with using language to express the immediacy of their feelings. Adela, Angela, Isabella, and Mark are typical examples of how many of the students interpreted the assignment, expressing anger, frustration, and struggle. Whereas these papers lacked distance on the problem and control of the subject, the writings reflected the use of language for personal problem solving. Therefore, the perception of this assignment and its purpose as a problem-solving activity was a critical stage/point in the classroom process.

When papers were shared and classroom dialogue occurred, other students began to understand the use of writing as a process of honesty and critical reflection, as will be seen in the next assignment. However, as observed in the choices students made about what to include and what to leave out of their paper, a range of personal and community values may also play into this process of writing narrative, of using writing for critical reflection and problem solving.

The use of language for critical reflection began with writing and sharing honest, specific descriptions of experience in the classroom. Students had an environment to work with interpreting experience individually and to interact with others who triggered memories and opinions and raised critical questions. Students developed a stronger sense of the purpose, the meaningfulness, of writing when they used reading and writing in ways directly related to a shared concern in their lives. As we will see, this process only began with this assignment. Ideas discussed in the first paper, such as the themes of **hidden meanings** and **writing as therapy,** continued to be written about throughout the semester. In the context of classroom interaction, this narrative assignment reflected complex interactions rather than isolated authorship, making students aware of themselves and others through these experiences.

Section 2
Writing about Family/Community Attitudes about Reading and Writing

Background/Theory

In this second section of the data, I consider again students' interpretation of the writing situation and its effect on the process. I am interested in the ways of constructing knowledge that students bring into the situation, looking closely at the writing as well as observing interactions among students and myself as we negotiate goals and expectations of the assignment. Researchers (Bartholomae 1987, Bizzell 1986, Rose 1987) are concerned with the labeling of basic writers. How are these students different? Is their thinking different? However, boundaries that attempt to set these students and their thinking apart are fuzzy, and individual students often do not fit the categories. Composition instructors are concerned with these students' analytical and critical thinking skills but often lack understanding and appreciation for the ways of knowing that students bring into the classroom. This section of the research provides insights into the ways students go about researching an assignment on the topic of literacy in their lives and the classroom factors that play into the process.

In this section, I am looking at the second paper in the series of writing assignments. The purpose of the assignment was to move students from personal experience to an exploration of the subject through encountering others' experiences and ideas. The students were asked to do family/community research on the topic of reading and writing. Traditionally, analysis is often taught through the teaching of conventions and forms (e.g., compare and contrast, classification, argumentation). My interest is in the inductive skills of analysis that students brought to the situation. I wanted students to problematize (Freire 1973), to analyze and think critically (Shor 1992, 1987; Berlin 1988), about reading and writing situations. However, my approach was quite different from the theorists just mentioned. Rather than setting up the framework for analysis using the ideology of these scholars, I chose to work with inductive thinking where the analysis was not structured by an agenda. I wanted to see how students would describe and talk about the subject using their own stategies for understanding. I wanted to observe the diverse interpretive strategies students brought to the classroom and the effects of classroom interaction. Before looking at the data, I want to briefly comment on the position of this research in terms of current discussion surrounding the social-epistemic school and the cognitive and philosophical schools of composition research.

A major movement in transactional rhetoric is social-epistemic rhetoric. Although a diverse group, "they [these researchers] share the notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation." (Berlin, 1988, 488). A major assumption in the work of most social-epistemic theorists is that students need liberating, and a major purpose of writing instruction is to increase awareness of power structures and encourage democratic participation and political liberation. While I find the concerns of this group valid, I disagree with the particular political agenda. I find the idea of "liberating others" patronizing; however, I do agree with the educational goal of increasing awareness of power structures and encouraging democratic participation. This portion of my research contributes to an understanding of the social-epistemic school of rhetoric because it provides information about the cognitive processes of students analyzing their situations, family and community, and reflects the influences of class and community. Looking closely at these texts, free-writing, and classroom interactions provides data about the complexity of analysis, the personal and social factors that affect the "rational process."

Stuart Greene, who speaks for the cognitive school of rhetoric, questions the social-epistemic school when he writes, "I argue that as the pendulum has swung in composition studies from a focus on cognition to social structures, we have begun to lose sight of how individuals reflect, form judgments, make choices and construct meaning within culturally organized practices" (1990, 152). He continues to raise questions when he writes, "I suggest that there are weaknesses in social theorists' failure to discuss how individuals acquire knowledge, or how task and context constrain students' performance" (1990, 153). Greene questions the liberatory classroom because "methodological approaches to teaching cultural and disciplinary knowledge do not address how individuals construct meaning, use knowledge for their own purposes, or engage in the sort of reflective processes that influence how individuals will act in a given situation" (1990,162). Greene expresses the need for research to "develop a multi-perspective description of the ways in which context and cognition interact–not a single vision or image of the writing process, but rigorously grounded theoretical explanations that can inform us about the processes of making meaning, of entering a discourse, and reading to write" (1990,163). Greene is concerned that we understand how authority and reactions to authority manifest themselves in students experienced with academic tasks. How do students achieve power and develop voice? I share Greene's concern with the cognitive processes involved in the construction of meaning. From classroom experience, I have an appreciation for the individuality of these processes as contrasted to research that attempts to generalize. This section of the data represents individuals' problem-solving activities as reflected in their writing, individual action growing from its social context.

Post-modern philosophy, especially the deconstructionist, also provides a perspective on this situation because the focus of post-modern literary theory puts language in the context of discourse at the center of the rhetorical understanding. Word meanings are complex with history and connotation. Language is what makes communication and knowledge construction possible, but we must always remind ourselves that it is only a construction with limitations and can not be studied in isolation. The evolving sense of the individual with its dependence on the contextual whole asks us to continually rethink the constructs we use for describing rhetorical situations. When we study student texts, we need to look for the historical influences on these texts. What are the students' histories with language and their perceptions of the process? What is the classroom history, the events preceding the assignment? What is school writing? What motivation directs the process? How does confidence/authority affect decisions in the text? What voices are present in the text? Bahktin uses the words "dialogized" and "double voiced" in The Dialogic Imagination to explain the merging of history and presence, writer, text, and context (1981). These theories encourage us to look at writing in the complexity of its context, with its multiplicity of voices. The descriptive nature of my research attempts to reflect the roles/effects of authority as well as classroom interaction on voice. What does it mean to write in school? This narrative description with the students' texts is an attempt to reconstruct some of the complex interaction that affects a text. I am attempting here to trace language/ideas as they move among students and are echoed in classroom dialogue and in different writing.

Philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes an understanding of the process of interpretation and is most in line with what I am attempting to do in my classroom. The rhetorical activity of creating meaning, convincing, and persuading cannot ignore the reflective awareness of its process of interpretation. "Reflecting on an interpretation is not the same thing as having one" (Crusius 1992, 30). Philosophical hermeneutics asks that the probing continue. "The goal of hermeneutical rhetoric is never-ending inquiry, not the safety and too-easy satisfaction of ‘political correctness’ " (Crusius, 69). Recognizing unconscious aspects of understanding is recognizing the complexity of resistance and change. This portion of the data illustrates how writing often creates a situation that encourages reflective thinking. Through writing and sharing writing, students became aware of the interpretive process.

David Bartholomae (1987) and Mike Rose (1987) are both concerned with the basic writer and academic expectations. Both believe that there is a tendency to create situations where students oversimplify in order to meet expectations of organization and form. Rose believes that students should be immersed immediately in academic topics and forms of writing. David Bartholomae (1987) agrees with Rose's criticism of some basic writing classes, but he works with a process of initiating students to new ways of thinking and writing by having students think and write critically about their experiences. He believes that students need to see themselves in the world in a way that enables them to turn "their experience into 'subject matter' and to define a relationship with the subject that makes creative thinking possible" (91). Greene and Ackerman believe that constructivist research too often has reflected "larger biases in American education toward the conservation and recitation of knowledge" (1995, 394) as contrasted to literacy as engagement, as participation in community. They believe we need to understand "literacy in terms of the ability to both represent one's ideas and interact with others" (394).

From my early assignments in the series of topics in this course, one can see that I believe that students need to work analytically with their own experiences, developing critical analytical skills, connecting the meaningfulness of this process to their lives. Experience over the years has shown me that students need a commitment to the relevance of analytical activities before doing them. Thus, this section of the research documents students' processes of contructing meaning, of researching a personally immediate subject. Because the topic was presented as open-ended inquiry, students used diverse methods for exploring the topic. Classroom interaction was a critical element, as we can note the influence of other students' ideas and reactions on different students' writing. In reflecting on this unit, I can see that my comments at the time reflect the struggle of a teacher's understanding of "research," "problematizing," and students' understanding of "research," of "purpose." Students have little experience with the academic form of writing that analyzes a situation. I have noted specific places in the classroom experience where a particular student's perception of the use of writing seemed to shift, where the writing process was understood in a new way.

Theories are often philosophical, creating a picture of the complexity of issues surrounding classroom writing and its context. Instructors of basic writing work with these concepts in "real time," making decisions about assignments and classroom acitivities. Concern with students' ability to evaluate, generalize, and synthesize information must take into consideration what students bring to the classroom as well as students' experience of the classroom context of writing situations. This section reflects my concern with language and schooling, how students interpret these situations. The basic writer, such as the student in the freshman composition course, is entering a new community with new expectations. The school experience involves using language in different ways, and each level of education puts particular demands on cognitive growth. Vygotsky (1986, 1978) as well as other social theorists believes that the process of writing itself affects communicative and cognitive development. These researchers propose that it is not experience we learn from, but thinking about experience. Writing provides a unique situation for this type of reflection. Thus, this research provides description and understanding of the evolving relationship between writing and cognition in this group of students.

This section provides insight into the methods of creating meaning that students brought to the classroom. Description of the context as well as the writings provides a picture of the situation where different individuals meet and work at understanding, raising questions: What do students bring to the situation? What do writers perceive as the purpose of writing? What does the teacher expect? What does the teacher communicate? Where do students gain new insights about the process?

The complexity of socially constructed meanings challenges me as the writer of this story. Through description of writing and interaction, I attempt to create my understanding of the issues affecting this situation. By using large sections of student discourse, I hope to represent the realities and understandings students brought to the situation as well as the strategies.

Having the class write about the topic of reading and writing in their family and community provided me with students' description and interpretations of the attitudes that surround students. The challenge in presenting these data is to construct a moving picture that reflects processes and interaction of students in the context of situated writing. While constructing a picture of the classroom, the whole, I hope to show the individuality of responses to this situation without overwhelming the reader with examples. Therefore, I will refer to general patterns of the class and highlight students who illustrate particular points. My concerns in this section are with students' writings as they reflect their working with the purpose of the assignment and the authority of their voice. "Purpose" is the term used here to refer to how students interpreted this analytical task. The "authority" of their voice here refers to their concluding comments, their synthesis of meaning.

Assignment 2

In my preparation for the semester, I had left the topic for Paper #2 open. My plan was to have students do community research on a topic. Classes have very individual responses to topics, so I had not decided on the subject. I had considered having students research attitudes toward reading and writing, but needed to see how the first paper went before doing a second paper on the same topic. While working on the first paper, students made many positive comments about the benefits of writing and discussing attitudes on this subject, so I decided to have them take the subject further and collect experiences about reading and writing from other individuals. I wanted students to spend more time writing about feelings and attitudes toward reading and writing and to gain practice using sources of information outside their individual experience, in this case family or friends.

Literacy is a concern/problem for many of my students, their friends, and family. This assignment asked students to question what they observed and to interpret what they saw. While this assignment is drawn from some of the work of Freire and Shor, I did not move students toward a political interpretation of the problem. A purpose of the assignment was to have students work inductively, using the writing process to explore and discover. I hoped students would be able to synthesize, draw conclusions. Furthermore, I thought continuing discussion and reflection on this topic might encourage students' insights into their own attitudes. I believe that writing may encourage a unique form of reflective thinking.

Preparing for Paper #2

To prepare for this paper, we discussed how school writing asks us to move from more personal statements to more general statements about situations. I had students pull out the main ideas from their first papers, and I wrote them on the board. For example, from Carmela's paper I wrote, "Because I didn't ask questions about what I was supposed to do, I didn't like writing and avoided classes with writing." I gave examples of moving from the personal to the general. The class then made Carmela's thesis into a more universal statement: "When students don't ask questions, they don't understand what the teacher expects." We added "sometimes" and "some students" and talked about the reasons for not making statements that include everyone.

I then wrote on the board, "Research in this assignment is looking for something that you don't already know." I explained that I hoped they would discover information and get new ideas from this experience. We talked about the research process of collecting other people's attitudes toward reading and writing and seeing what the students could discover. I drew on the board a rectangle and wrote the percentages 80 percent and 20 percent to emphasize that this paper was to be about other people's experiences. The 20 percent was to reflect the personal synthesis (the combination of the writer's experience and the people interviewed). The 80 percent was to be others' experiences. During the next class, we looked at several papers from assignment #1 in order to find key ideas and how these ideas were expressed, developed, and/or supported. We then discussed their work on the draft of Paper #2 as expansions of the first paper. What were the personal questions or interests that had come up in writing the first paper? I wrote on the board "Questioning" and "Clues" and emphasized paying attention to the leads and asking questions.

I was worried that this paper was pushing students too far on the topic; they had just written about this subject. I've noticed in the past that students easily become bored with a subject and want to move on. When I heard Sally and Isabella arranging to meet later so that they could interview each other for their papers, I felt better. They had realized during the discussion that their family experiences had both been painful and that they had both found reading/or writing as ways of coping. They wanted to interview each other and talk more. Later that week, I watched them work together one evening in the Learning Center for several hours, deep into the sharing of their experiences with family and school. This connection between Sally and Isabella seemed important to both of them at the time. Students found their own directions. Carmela had decided to interview her sons and focus on the family aspect of her first paper, while Lucas told us he was interviewing an immigrant friend who had similar experiences learning English in the United States. I was both curious and concerned about how students would approach the topic.

Students brought in drafts for Paper #2 on February 7. First they answered questions about their papers on their work sheets and then met in small groups to share and discuss their papers. My field notes for that day communicate what I often experience early in the semester when students are adjusting to expectations:

> It was one of those day that is a mixed bag in terms of who has what kind of a draft. Lucas had a very rough draft (handwritten interview notes). Mark had lost his and started another on the computer during lab . . . Thomas had no draft. He had called four people who hung up on him when he asked them questions about reading. I suggested that he write the paper about that experience. Connie, Michael M., and Lucas seemed to work as a successful group. All had drafts, and the conversation seemed focused on how to integrate quotations and organize the paper. Adela had been in the hospital and had no draft. Sharon had not been able to interview anyone, so she had no draft. Kass, Susan, and Angela had had a seemingly engaging discussion, commenting on each other's drafts, discussing school experiences. Carmela and Isabella got a late start because each took a long time with the individual part of the work sheet. Isabella had told me in the Writing Lab that she didn't want to think about this subject and her children, so I wondered what it was like for her to hear Carmela's paper, which involved extensive conversations with her children. Kim, who had not turned any work in, called me over to tell me, 'I am in the process of leaving my alcoholic, abusive husband. I couldn't get into my house this weekend to get my book and papers. I have had three migraine headaches in four days. I am making myself sick. He is jealous of me being in school. He thinks I'm coming to pick up on the boys.' She dropped the course a few weeks later. Dorothy had no draft because she said that she didn't exactly understand the assignment and, although she had talked to her husband, she said, 'He really didn't have much to say.'

I include this scenario directly from my field notes to give a more complete picture of what happens when students tackle an assignment. For most, the process is a struggle; daily life pulls their attention, and challenges become obstacles. The assignment asked them to do something new; it was unfamiliar territory. In this situation, I need to hear what is happening and make suggestions, support those who are prepared and encourage those who are overwhelmed. For example, I told Thomas that the discouraging responses he had received were OK; they showed us family and community attitudes; he could write about these reactions. He seemed surprised; he did not think that such negative responses could be what we were looking for. I explained that we were looking at real situations, not ideals. These small interactions can be critical in communicating a process that may not conform with what students have experienced previously in school. I needed to interpret the assignment individually in many cases according to the individual's initial direction.

Looking at Paper #2

When I collected, read, and reacted to these drafts, my first thought was a concern with whether I had communicated the idea of using writing to explore and research. Did students understand what I wanted them to do in this assignment? I wanted students to have a sense of a problem or question and proceed to investigate it. My purpose in this assignment was to have students use analytical, problem-solving skills on their own experiences with family and community. As a teacher/researcher, I wanted to see the process of thinking critically and creating meaning. However, my concept of this process was new to students. Most of these drafts did not have explicit questions or even implicit questions; many of the drafts were just descriptions of other people's experiences with reading and writing. I felt the papers lacked interpretation of the situation. I felt challenged to communicate better my expectations.

In the past, I have observed that using writing to ask a question, explore a concept, create a hypothesis, or pose a problem is not something that students have experience with. Too often writing has been taught as the representation or presentation of ideas already thought out elsewhere (Greene and Ackerman, 394). Writing is thought of as telling what you know. While the final paper in an assignment like this is a representation of what has been learned, the process of research involves looking carefully at situations to raise questions, provide insights on the subject. I am interested here in developing inductive thinking skills, the ability to create meaning from experiences.

Many of the papers presented information with little interpretation. Students chose to interview others with similar or different experiences. Four students (Lucas, Susan, Kass, and Elito) discussed individuals with similar experiences; the papers did not attempt to explain situations or raise questions. For example, Lucas wrote, *"Today I had the chance to interview my friend Fernando who is facing the same problem many of us are faced with today and that is the lack of education."* And Elito wrote, *"I talked to my good friend, Lizette, who feels almost the same way as I do. She said that reading and writing is our basic communication in our world, and that her experience with reading were great, but with writing she did not have any luck."* Two students (Sharon and Connie) discussed individuals who had different experiences than theirs. Connie made the statement *"that people have different attitudes towards reading and writing,"* while Sharon simply described an individual whose experience was different from hers. While these students may have had underlying questions, the papers did not give an indication of a question or a focus; the papers seemed just collections of stories.

The difficulty students have with interpreting and synthesizing experience and/or information is not something new to me as a composition teacher. Questions such as "What is the point? What do you want to say about it? Where is your concluding point?" are familiar comments and concerns of teachers. I was not seeking answers. I would have been pleased with a paper that raised a question. However, as a researcher this time, I spent considerably more time looking repeatedly at this set of papers. It was not just the students who were learning here, but I. Studying this set of papers again and again over a period of time, I have become more open to the individuality of what each student was doing and more confused about my early evaluations of what I thought they should have been doing. Students may not have used my idea of a research question, my methodology of asking a question, but they understood and were using methods of personal research. The point of this assignment was an exploration of attitudes toward reading and writing and some form of synthesis. For me, th I began to see that each student was exploring, was researching the topic, although the research approach was not always explicit. The process was happening; however, the language and form were not what I had been expecting. I began to see that in some cases just describing the attitude of another was a process of questioning and working with one's own experience. Rather than approaching these papers with the idea of deficiencies, asking why the papers lacked what I had expected in terms of questions and conclusions, I have chosen to look at the papers in terms of how the students did question, did explore, did work toward meaning. As a teacher, I need to understand more about how individuals read situations and assignments, how they think about questions and create meanings. Understanding students' ways of approaching the task enables me to communicate better about what they have done and what they need to do, and to help them articulate their process/thinking, rather than seeing only deficiences and then imposing my process/thinking.

I became interested in how to look at this range of inductive approaches. The assignment was quite open-ended, so I have chosen to look at basic decisions individuals made in their interpretation of the assignment. After reading the papers many times, I decided that the following questions provide the best heuristic for interpreting a pattern from these varied papers.

What can be observed about how the student interprets the purpose of the assignment, exploring the topic, raising questions?

Did the student choose to interview and write about a person or people who have different experiences and attitudes, or about those who have similar experiences and attitudes?

Did the student create some meaning from the collected information?

What factors seem to play into the process of synthesis, creating conclusions or meaning?

These questions do not work as guidelines for evaluation but as a heuristic for developing understanding. How students understand the **purpose** of an assignment that asks one to question and research and how students **create meaning** from information are important to me as a teacher. As a researcher, these concerns are connected to theoretical discussions of what happens when students enter academic communities as well as how authority issues affect an individual's voice.

I observed that the more important the personal concerns with reading and writing were to individuals, the stronger was their sense of inquiry in the paper. Students who had problems with reading and writing or were concerned with family members' attitudes toward reading and writing were invested in the search for explanations. For example, Carmela's concern was specific, a desire to know her children's attitudes toward reading and writing, to compare their experiences with hers. Of those students who attempted to question and explain situations, four papers attempted to understand differences. Angela's, Thomas's, Lynne's, and John's papers reflected an attempt to understand why others' attitudes toward reading and writing were different from theirs. Although these papers focused on differences in particular situations, they contained the larger questions: "Why is there a difference?" "What makes the difference?" Another group of students who sought explanations chose to interview others who shared their experiences. Isabella, Sally, Elito, and Lucas chose to understand more about their own experience by interviewing others who had similar experiences. Their papers reflected a closer look at their own motivation. "Why were reading and writing important to them?" I then looked at how students synthesized, created meaning, from the information collected. Did the writer have the conviction to make a statement about the subject? What was the spectrum of conviction/authority?

One group of papers (those written by Carmela, Lynne, Dorothy, Angela, and John) had explicit research questions. Each of these papers involved understanding other family members' attitudes toward reading and writing. Carmela was concerned with her children, Lynne with her niece, Dorothy her husband, Angela her brother, and John his little sister. Typically these papers set up the purpose of the assignment as a personal question. In presenting this research here, I have chosen to focus on particular students to illustrate what I saw as a range of approaches to the basic issues: how they perceive the purpose of the assignment and how they approach synthesizing meaning.

Carmela

A writer with a specific question who speaks here only for herself

Carmela's introduction illustrates an approach that reflects a specific question. Carmela's question was personal and focused: How did her sons relate to reading and writing? Her introductory paragraph indicates her question and the fact that some degree of discovery was involved in the process of writing the paper. The following is her introduction:

> *My parents did not care about my education, which affected my grades through out my school years. I promised myself, when I graduated from high school, that if I had any children in the future I would take their education serious. I had let my parents way of thinking about my education stop me from succeeding in education. So, I had decided that my children's education would come first above everything else they did in life. Since I now have two sons I shared with them, mine and their father's past experiences with reading and writing. Then I asked them about their experiences and thought about reading and writing. I was surprised by the responses they had given me.*

Carmela's paper reflects a very personal and focused question: what are her sons' attitudes toward reading and writing? Notice that the last sentence indicates that she "discovered" information. Carmela is a conscientious student who follows directions carefully. She remembered that I had encouraged them to "discover" something in the process. My language, I think, intrudes here. I suggested on her draft that she put her question into a broader context. Her first draft was a narrative of her interviews with her sons, while the final draft was organized around key concepts: attitudes about reading, writing, and their teachers. Carmela's questions were quite literal and seemingly easily answered in the interview process.

Carmela's paper is an example of the tension between the teacher's perception of the assignment and the student's perception of the assignment. I watch the battle inside myself sometimes of recognizing what a student is doing and wanting to push or direct a certain kind of thinking. In this case, I hoped to see exploration and questioning leading to a generalization and a conclusion that reflected a broader insight or a form of synthesis about family attitudes. She concludes this paper, however, much like the draft:

> *When I decided to interview my sons about their thoughts on reading and writing, I felt that this was my chance to determine whether or not I was fulfilling my promise to myself. I think that we all learned something, as a family, about how important education is. . . It made me feel good to know that my sons feel that I am helping them, or want to help them with their education.*

Carmela's question is personal, immediate. I, on the other hand, wanted a question, a synthesis, that reflects larger scope, greater concerns: for example, how does family influence attitudes toward reading and writing? These are my expectations because I am accustomed to such generalization or concluding comments in academic writing. I am familiar with social analysis.

My experience with academic writing sets up an expectation for generalization in the conclusion. Carmela's understanding of the assignment–even with suggestions–remained limited to interpreting her immediate situation. She does not make any kind of generalization about parents, children, and school. She does not write here with authority for others. She may question her place to speak beyond her experience. This paper raises questions for me about cultural, family, and personality influences on the writer's authority, the writer's sense of what it means to speak for others, to generalize.

Angela
A writer whose paper became a class project and a writer who had authority in her conclusion

Angela's paper #2 was particularly interesting because she was so motivated by her question that she drew the class into her process. She wrote a paper with a strong sense of purpose, and in her final draft she made a strong concluding statement. This paper was by far the best work she did all semester. Angela had lived with the question she researched for many years: Why has reading and school been easy for her brother and such a challenge for her? Remembering the key scene at the kitchen table in her first paper, I realized how much thought she had put into seeking the answer to this question. Angela's draft was very rough, really just notes taken from her discussion, but the comments at the beginning indicate the importance of this topic to her: *My first paper was very negative, so I interviewed my brother Tommy Martinez. He was the one I resented the most when it came to school he was always the smart one, so I asked him a few questions regarding reading*. She told a story of Tommy getting in trouble in elementary school, and how he didn't like the rules at school. The narrative was filled with the specific details her brother had dictated to her. Angela wanted to understand why her brother, who had many of the same experiences as she, has such a different attitude and different abilities when it comes to reading. The question charged the writing, pushed it. When the class worked with their drafts, Angela asked them to help her with the conclusion, so I want to include some comments on classroom interaction here.

What Happened in Class with Angela's Paper

On February 9, I returned the draft of Paper #2 and led discussion. After I read Connie's paper, which provided an opportunity to look at comparison and conclusions, I asked who else had questions or wanted his or her paper discussed. Angela said, "Let's look at my paper." She read her paper. I outlined how she had told about her brother's experiences and then returned to her question, "Why did her brother have such different experiences with reading?" I emphasized the importance of asking questions that get at specific stories. I then read the section about her brother's experience at a local elementary school. She had recorded verbatim Tommy's monologue (gaining the authority of her brother's voice):

> *I began to read The Pit and the Pendulum. I continued to read voraciously through the book. Class started and like always I continued reading. The teacher took notice and asked me why I was not paying attention. I said, 'I found this really interesting book.' Then the so called teacher rudl[e]y grabbed the book right out of my hands. (I guess some teachers don't want one to read what one likes, yet they enocurage it.) At that point of my life I noticed the hypocracy that dwells in all schools.*

Students laughed and shared similar stories about authority figures in elementary school. After everyone stopped laughing and sharing comments about the need to have more choices and freedom in elementary school, we returned to the question: Why did Angela and her brother have different attitudes? The class noticed that her brother had not had a good experience at school. School had not been what made the difference.

The fact that the class did not have an easy answer to this question seemed to intrigue students. They were involved in this question, the discussion. The comparison of individual experiences generated questions of "why?" and students began to talk about individual circumstance and responsibility. If school or family had not made the difference, what made the difference? They did not have a simple answer. Students began to look for factors that might explain the difference. Sally observed, "He found an author he could relate to." As too often happens at this point, class was over. Because students had been intrigued with this paper, I decided to use a copy of Angela's draft for further discussion and as an exercise in writing conclusions. Her text, therefore, played a central role in the process of this assignment, bringing out emotions and surfacing questions which affected other students writing. The following is Angela's first draft. Notice that in several places, she uses the exact words of her brother:

> *My first paper was very negative, so I interviewed my brother Tommy. He was the one I resented the most when it came to school he was always the smart one. So I asked him a few questions regarding reading. In which he has a very positive outlook on reading. He feels reading can help in many different ways. One can gain new knowledge, new ideas, different ways of looking at things. In away its a process of experiencing the world around us. It remains one of his favorite thing to do.*
>
> *What has reading done for you? Reading has enlighten me its given me somewhat of an escape from regular society, helped me come up with many of my own ideas. The type of reading I hav[e] done has given me a chance to look into a person's or certain life style or character in which I enjoy reading about more than he writes, meaning biography or autobiography.*
>
> *So what was your first experience with these books? It all started a dreary day at [a local] Elementary School, let me tell you, the day was as cold*

> *as the home. I stumbled into the school library. As I brushed my uncombed hair out of my eyes, a book came into view the Meloncholy House of Usher. From then on I remain possessed by the writing of Edge Allen Poe. Having skimmed threw the selected works of Edger Allen Poe, I could not wait to begin reading. I took the book back to class. Normally at this time of day the first recess bell was soon to ring. As the class was dismissed I enthusiastically grabed my book and began to walk out the door. He reached the gym where snotty dirt faced kids walked slowly, languidly to the playground. I found a nice quite, cozy and warm place to read. I began to read the Pit and the Penduleum. I continued to read veracisouly threw the book. Class started and likewise I continued reading. The teacher took notice and asked me why I was not paying attention. I said "I found this really interesting book." Then the so called teacher rudly grabbed the book right out of my hands. (I guess some teachers don't want one to read what one likes, yet they encourage it.) At that point of my life I noticed the hypocracy that dwells in all schools. Then I asked the teacher "Why am I not allowed to read this book?" Then the teacher said, "You must learn what the class is learning because you are on my time." Then I said "Well since your here and I'm here I figure its our time. Needless to say I landed up in the principal's office and resorted to haveing to read the book at home."*

This piece of writing is interesting in her use of her brother's exact words. Also, in her brothers words, I can hear a bit of Edgar Allen Poe. I have had Angela's brother in class and know that he is an avid reader of Poe and a strong writer. Angela's writing was difficult to read, so I typed the draft and copied it. The next time we met, I asked students to read Angela's draft and then free-write ideas that might work as a conclusion. Small groups then shared their writings and worked toward a conclusion for Angela's paper. My field notes reflect the challenge of discussion when the topic is complex, discussion working with the inductive process:

> The discussion is difficult to recapture and felt quite chaotic. Perhaps it was that I didn't explain what I wanted clearly enough or they didn't understand how to work with the paper rather than going off on their personal ideas. I don't remember this happening in the past when we work with an essay from the book. Perhaps because it was a student essay, a lot more personal connections seemed allowed or appropriate. . . . One group wanted to know more about the life experience that made the brother and sister different. . . . John referred to the difference between doing and reading, and he commented on exploring that angle of the comparison. After hearing other students' free-writing, Mark said about his free-writing, "I went off in all directions and now I see what you want." Isabella discussed her reaction to authority in the story. She saw a problem with teachers controlling students' learning. Another group made personal connections back to the idea of wanting "to do" rather than "to read."Mark spoke up and said he related in his group to Connie's question of what happened that made the difference." (Field notes Feb. 16)

Although there was no consensus about the conclusion, I hoped students understood the process of questioning and making connections between questions and stories, eventually synthesizing meaning. As I recall future discussions and look at final papers, I realize that this discussion, which felt chaotic, was quite significant. Threads of ideas discussed that day are evident in several places in my data. For example, John strongly identified with the idea in Angela's paper that some people like to "do" while other people like to "read," as indicated by his free-write and his final paper. Adela made comments referring directly to the discussion about family influences and individual responsibility that reflected the discussion's tone of taking responsibility for attitude rather than blaming schools or families. And most importantly, I believe that

Angela used the discussion to develop a strong conclusion for her paper, a belief in what she was writing.

Angela received attention and respect for this paper. The group had given Angela a lot of emotional support and confidence, as well as a sense of direction for the conclusion of her paper. Angela's frustration with her reading problems and her brother's aptitude motivated a paper that made a careful comparison between her brother's attitude and her attitude, by far the best paper she wrote during the semester. This example of class work reflects the level of work a student can achieve with the collaboration of students with stronger skills. Vygotsky refers to this as the "zone of proximal development." After describing her brother's love of the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Angela concluded her final paper with the following:

> *In all my school years, I never thought reading was interesting. In my whole life I have read about 6 books. I remember reading Superfudge in the fourth grade, the Outsiders I read in the eighth grade.... If I was to start reading again I wouldn't know where to start.*
>
> *So to say the differences are quit in extrems. My brother says reading is very interesting. To him reading brings fulfillment, entertainment, and excitment. In my case I need to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste to get my fulfillment, I think reading is for people who can expand there minds, and fulfill themselves with the knowledge that lies in a book.*

Angela did the assignment. She explored the difference and explained what she saw as separating readers from non-readers. She presented her insight as a conclusion, a generalization. Angela had the emotional energy to define and explore this question. It is difficult to state cause and effect here, but I sensed that the respect the class had given Angela's paper contributed to the authority of her voice in the conclusion. She could apply her insights to the general "people" because she had already tested them with her audience and knew she had support.

John

A student who begins to use writing to explore his own attitudes

A close look at John's paper provides valuable insights into how a student's understanding of the purpose and process of writing affects the text. Because John changed the focus of his paper between the draft and the final paper, we can see a shift from a more traditional deductive approach to an inductive approach, a shift from presenting known/accepted information to exploring personal concerns. In this case, the student's question was hidden in the middle of first draft. John had mastered writing well-organized deductive essays. In his first paper, John wrote that both reading and writing were important activities to him. In this second paper, John looks at others' experiences. After describing a variety of attitudes toward reading and writing, John stated and answered the question of why people read. John's draft was organized deductively around the following thesis: There are so many different examples of what reading and writing is and is not to people. One example is those that find freedom, relaxation, and a way to release stress, simply by sitting down and reading. John has been trained in the traditional five-paragraph essay structure. John develops his paper around how reading provides relief from stress for people like his parents who are police officers and need an escape from pressure. However, in the middle of this paper when he is discussing his parents' habit of reading to his sister, he discovers a more personal and unanswered question. This question tucked in the middle of the paper could be seen as an off-the-track comment because it does not fit with his thesis or conclusion. He had written:

> *I saw this [his sister's enthusiasm for reading]. I was curious of how accepting of reading I was as a child compared to now. Now, I do not enjoy reading. I have vague memories of when it was not so bad. My mom informed me of nights I would insist on someone reading to me. As a very young child, I loved to sit in the rocking chair with someone, and*

> *read alone with them my Dr. Suess books, I have no idea why now I cannot have the same passion.*

The process of writing brought up this comparison and reflection that led to a more personally compelling question, one that contradicts the enthusiasm of his first paper. John concludes his draft by returning to the idea of reading as a release of stress. As a student John had learned well the deductive method of writing a paper. He had made a statement with his clear thesis. He knew the question and the answer: Why do some people enjoy reading? Some people enjoy reading because it is an escape from stress and pressure. But a haunting question revealed itself in the draft, and he recognized it: Why had he lost this passion for reading that he saw in his sister? Because he was creating a structured paper, he had not explored this question that had surfaced in the process.

I had students read their drafts and free-write about "the feelings that came up" when they read their drafts. I wanted to try a less rational approach for exploring the topic. In the free-writing he did in class, John recognized a question. The following is the free-writing:

> *The only part of my paper that I feel anything or that I put any feelings into is the part about my little sister. I remember times as I was writing I would think deeply about what sort of things she does. I would get sidetracked from my paper and want to focus on just my sister. I feel strongly about her continuing to read so I wish I could have focused on her more in my paper and why I feel this way.*

Reflection on text as well as reflection on experience is critical behavior in looking for insights, asking and answering questions. Awareness that interpretation involves feelings as well as thoughts is also critical. Vygotsky emphasizes the cognitive role of writing in the process of reflective thinking. Seeing written expression of thinking can generate new insights. Other classroom interaction contributed to John's seeing the topic in a new way. When students were helping Angela with her conclusion, I had them choose a sentence from her paper and free-write on it. They were encouraged to work toward a concluding idea for her paper. John did a free-writing in reaction to Angela's paper that prompted ideas related to further questioning of why he had lost interest in reading. He chose the following sentence in Angela's draft to free-write on: *In my case I need to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste to get my fulfillment.* The following is John's free-writing:

> *I am the same way [as Angela], I like to actually do something rather than read about someone else doing it. I know my trade off for reading,*

> *what are [Angela's]? What does she see, touch, hear, smell, and taste to fulfill her needs?*

Classroom interaction among students around student texts (their own and others) is a catalyst that provides more options, more questions for the writer to consider. Students begin to see that interpretations vary. Interaction can, as it did in this case, reveal complexity. The context of the classroom and the processes of thinking and writing in these papers are clearly entangled, intertwined. Whereas students in this class do not seem as comfortable interacting with texts from the book, sharing ideas and language about each other's writing is clearly evident.

Although his final paper included extensive discussions of his parents and sister, John changed his final draft to focus on his attitude toward reading and writing as well as his parents'. The final paper did not have a simple answer; instead it explored the important question of why his attitude toward reading had changed. The paper contained serious self-reflection on the topic as the following section illustrates:

> *I hope that my sister does not lose her passion for reading as I did. Sports seemed to be the way I found not only relaxation, but I found myself. Sports and television were my tradeoffs for reading, I know that since I was not an active reader in school, I missed out on some important grades. It always seemed to be easier for me to go outside and throw a football or sit in front of the T.V. all night rather than behind the novel my class was reading. I would always find excuses not to do my assignments and the reading required for the next day. Then when I got to class I would fail the pop quizzes on the book and could not participate in the class discussion. . . . All of these failing grades were due to my utter dislike of reading. Although I realize now what my mistakes were then, I still find myself putting my reading assignments to the side.*

John had started out with a formulaic deductive paper with a thesis he knew; however, by paying attention to clues in his own paper and reacting to ideas in another student's paper, John found a personal question that was meaningful to explore. It is interesting to note that this description of his high school experience with reading reflects a different part of the picture than his earlier description of reading Of Mice and Men in Paper #1. In contrast to his first paper, in which he described his positive involvement with reading and writing, this second paper dealt with a more honest discussion of his problem with motivation. His final paper reflected attitudes and ideas that had surfaced in classroom discussion.

This situation illustrates the problems and the dangers of an emphasis on answers, resolutions, tight formulas. The student who is adept with form may not discover the process of using writing to explore and uncover. The personal nature of problem solving in this final paper raises questions for the researcher/teacher who is concerned with developing skills of abstraction and generalization. John illustrated in his first draft his ability to generalize and create abstract universal thesis statements. However, his use of language to question and work with such a critical topic as his motivation and reading habits seems equally, if not more, important in the context of his educational experience. John's case provides insight into the process of interpretation. Where does interpretation begin and end? Is an interpretation an answer or just a place to begin asking questions? How do emotions play into this process?

Thomas

A writer who hesitates sometimes to make judgments about family and friends

Thomas's paper reflects the complexity of exploring personal and community issues. Thomas set out to explore attitudes; however, the interpretation of his experience presented a challenge. He has trouble making generalizations. His interpretation then seems to return to a reinforcement of his attitude. Thomas in his paper researches people who have attitudes that are different from his. He researches his family and community. He does not have an explicit question. However, he has probably lived with his question about difference for some time, just as Angela has. Whereas Thomas's Paper #1 was set in the context of school and described a positive attitude toward reading and writing, Paper #2 portrayed his family and community and a very different attitude. Thomas sets out to understand people he knows who have had bad experiences with reading and writing. His approach was to describe these situations rather than question why because the subject matter is emotionally complex. This draft reflects the honesty of rendering experience and the challenge of creating meaning. Because this paper captures experience and provides a student's interpretation of his community, I include it in its entirety here:

In my search for people who had bad experiences with reading and writing, I found that some of the people who are related to me don't like the topic at all, for example: my aunt, my uncle, one of my cousins, and a close friend of mine.

My aunt, who lives right next door to me, "doesn't like reading because she doesn't always comprehend what I have just read," she stated. Her attitude toward reading has been with her since grade school, "I can start reading a book one day, pick it up the next day and forget all that I had read and have to start over again," she commented. I suggested that she might not be paying close attention to the material she is reading, she disagreed. When I asked her how she felt about writing her attitude didn't improve much, "I've never liked writing either, but I used to keep a personal journal in High School just as a hobby." I asked her what she would include in her journal and she answered, "just personal happenings and I wrote in short hand." Once she informed me of this, I began to question her pride in reading and writing.

My uncle is a totally different subject, he doesn't like the topic at all. He made it through High School with great ease, "It was a piece of cake for me, I never had trouble getting the hang of the work, but I found it one of the most boring things to do." When I asked him if he had ever taken the time to sit down and read a book, he said "It's not worth my time or energy." I also asked him if he liked reading the newspaper for a source of news, he said, "No, I get enough information by watching the news on the T.V." When I was beginning to ask if he had ever kept a journal or wrote short stories for a hobby, he shouted, "no, now stop *asking such stupid questions you dumb ass," and he hung up the phone and cut the interview short.*

After questioning my cousin on the topic, who had the best attitude of them all, and how he felt about reading and writing, he said, "I don't care to much for it, but if I had to do it I think I'd manage just fine." Reading for him is one of the most boring things to do and writing journals and short stories makes him want to puke his guts out, but for the most part he doesn't mind it.

Yesterday afternoon I was talking to a frind of mine who I hadn't seen since he dropped high school and I decided to ask him some questions on how he felt toward readng and writing. To my surprise he said he enjoyed reading, I asked what he liked to read about and he said, "The Adventures of Superman, other comic books, newspapers and magazines." He also likes to read to his son at night top. His attitude toward writing wasn't as good as his attitude toward reading. He said, "I never liked writing to much because my spelling sucks wind and I can't even read my own handwriting." I decided to cut the questions short for this guy because I wanted to talk about other things, since I hadn't seen him in quite a while.

In conclusion, I think that these people never really liked reading and writing, but they have learned to live with it, because it's a part of life that people have to learn. I also think that their attitudes compared to mine aren't as good as what they should be because it affects all of them and the people that they are associated with in several ways. I believe that if people try to change their attitudes towards reading and writing they might discover a side of themselves that will make them a

> *more well-rounded person, because when I was assigned to do it I was changed for life.*

Thomas's paper has many contradictions, even within one sentence. How can one feel that short stories *makes him want to puke his guts out, but for the most part he doesn't mind it.*?

The sort of internal contradictions that exist in each characterization may be the result of the emotional complexity of doing research in one's family, one's community. There seems to me to be an unspoken question: Why am I different? How can these people hate reading? Thomas' free-writing on his final paper and on reactions to other papers read in class give some sense of the internal process of understanding difference that Thomas lives with daily.

> *Freewriting on my reaction towards my paper. I think that this paper is very good in terms of feelings and ideas. The feelings are negative but they are also a few positive ones. The fact that people don't like to read and write shocks me but it also relieves me that some of these people found ways to get around it...*
>
> [reaction to Lucas' paper] *it makes me think that i'm very lucky to be attending school full time and working part time. . . .if it wasn't for financial aid I probably would be pushing a shovel right now instead of this pencil.*
>
> [reaction to John's paper*] I think that people who read for pleasure should be commended because alot of the people that I know don't like to read for <***>.*

This free-writing, I think, reflects Thomas's need to reinforce his values and what he is doing rather than explore why others are different. The last sentence shows his strong emotional reaction to those around him who don't read. The question of differences here does not lend itself to simple interpretation, especially because the interpretation is of those close to the writer. Thomas' writing reflects how students were becoming more honest.

Adela
A writer who uses the authority of her parents

Adela's final draft of Paper #2 reflects the struggles and attitudes of her family and others in the community. Adela had been sick and had personal problems at the beginning of the semester, so her work was turned in much later. She turned in Paper #2 more than a month after the other students. Her ideas, therefore, I'm sorry to say, were not discussed in class. I am including most of the essay here because the ideas need to be seen in their context.

> *I interviewed my mom and dad for this paper. I was interested in their attitudes and feelings about reading and writing. It was interesting what my mom and dad had to say about this. Reading and writing isn't only the subject, but it connects to something that has a lot to do with it. It comes down to wealth and education. Here's what my mom and dad had to say.*
>
> *I had asked my mom how she felt about reading and writing and, if she had a good or bad attitude about it. She responded by first saying that she hates reading, but she does love to write. . . My mom is a secretary for* [a local school]. *She says that it's so sad to see some of the kids there that still don't even know how to read and write properly. She sees this every day, but no one seems to take the time to correct or help those students. She sees that it brings down their self-esteem and brings to drop out or do bad things, like drugs. She wishes there was something she could do to help, but also says she can't do it herself either.*
>
> *I asked my dad the same question. He responded by saying that he feels too that some just do get the proper reading and writing education. Your either to poor or don't have the time to pay attention.*

> *He says that he has no choice to read because of his job, but he would never pick up a book to read. . . .*
>
> *My dad says that he too feels that he didn't get the right reading education. The teachers were too busy or they just didn't care. How could he care if they didn't. . . .*
>
> *My dad feels that three-fourths of the problem comes down to wealth. This is because the rich have the money but too busy to pay attention. They pay someone to pay attention. And as for the poor, they don't have enough money to send their children to good schools so they could learn the basic reading and writing subject.*
>
> *If someone has a reading and writing disability, help should not be based on whether you're black, white, brown, rich or poor, it should be for everyone and open to all school.*

Adela's paper reflects insecurity; the entire text is taken from her parents, her parents' words. This paper definitely asks the Bakhtinian question "Who is doing the talking?" (Wertsh, Voices of the Mind, 124). In another section, I will follow what Adela did through the semester.

Lucas

A writer who uses the assignment to share his situation and reinforce his purposes.

Not all students used difference to explore this topic. Many students chose to interview individuals who had similar experiences. Several students shared experiences where language skills were barriers to achieving their goals. Lucas conveys the reality of reading and writing when they mean survival. Lucas's writing on these first papers echoes a sense of the necessity of reading and writing English for economic survival in this country. He describes his own experiences in the first paper when he writes:

> *I remember one time when my teacher had me explain to the class how the cooling system works in a engine it was very hard for me to find the necessary words to explain the mehcanics of the cooling system in the engine. It is funny I passed that class, there was times when we had to do alot of reading and writing. I remember having to stay up late in to the night doing my homework. But I think by the end of the course I was able to show my teacher that I was good enough to be a mechanic.*

The need to prove with language that one is good enough can put stress on an individual and create resentments toward the process. In his second paper, he describes a friend's experience:

> *Fernando grew up in a very small town in South America where he was able to finish high school. His family was very poor and could not put him through college. He always wanted to become a lawyer or something like that so that he could make lots of money to help support his family who still in South America. . . . I could not help but noticed that he spoke with some anger toward the fact that he could not read and write very well. . . . I found out that he [Fernando] has been trying to learn how to read and write English for a while. "life has not been easy for me" Fernando says." When I first came to this country, I was living in Tucson Arizona, where I got a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant where later I became a cook. I went to college there but did not learn anything, so I quit … Jobs were hard to find in Las Cruzes, Therefore I had to lied about my education in order to get a job. Once I had a job, I decided to go back to college. it was very hard to keep up with work and school because of the long hours I was working after a while I was forced to quit school once again. . . . [He describes several events and the move to*

> *this city.] After living in [this city] for about four years I feel that I should go back to school and give it another chance. Since I am going to live in this country for the rest of my life, maybe it is not too late for me to get educated, Fernando replied with sadness on his face.*
>
> *Even though education does not come easy, many people like Fernando are willing to give it one more try and hope that this time everything will go well, and they are able to get the education they have been trying to get for such a long time.*

The story that Lucas tells about Fernando is in many ways also Lucas' story, the struggles with English and school, the struggles with working long hours to support a family and doing schoolwork at the same time. As mentioned, this paper touched many of the students. When I first read the paper, I asked myself, "What is the question? What is Lucas researching or exploring?" However, remembering that this is Lucas's story too, I recognize that the paper represents personal research with a different purpose. The writer is not attempting to give the reader "new insights" but is giving the reader a story, an understanding of what "many people like Fernando are willing to do." Lucas is interpreting his own story through the story of another who has similar experiences, goals, and challenges. Perhaps, like Thomas, Lucas is reinforcing his own purposes, strengthening his own motivation.

Isabella and Sally

Writers who shared a story and spoke with authority

Papers written by Isabella and Sally exemplify the use of similarity to explore the meaningulness of their own experience. Isabella and Sally both wanted to discuss the use of writing to heal painful family situations. Isabella and Sally had been affected by each other's stories when they shared them in a small-group discussion the first day students shared Paper #1. They decided to interview each other for the second paper. They spent considerable time together, and both wrote long, detailed papers. These writings express both the pain and the compassion of these two young women. The experience of these two students writing each other's story was quite unique. The enthusiasm that they had for this assignment was noticeable. They spent hours together in the Learning Center interviewing each other and did extensive work on their final drafts. Isabella turned in a third draft with more extensive revision and editing. Both papers were quite lengthy, five typed pages. The assignment was important to them. Again, like Lucas, these students did not seem to be searching for an answer, but instead reinforcing an experience that they had had. Isabella in her introduction gave an overview of their subject:

> *Family experiences have a serious effect on a child's attitude toward reading and writing. If the child gets a lot of negative attention or if the parents get a divorce the child might shut down. I went to this young lady, whom I will call Ann, to ask her about her experience with reading and writing. She grew up in a broken home with her little sister and mother. Because of the divorce, Ann and her sister ony visited their father on weekends. Her story is different from mine. In my situation my parents stayed together. Yet, there is a lot of mental and emotional abuse in my home. This made me not want to read and write. Both of our family's experiences had a negative effect on our reading and writing.*

Isabella described in detail the feelings "Ann" [Sally] had when her parents divorced, and she was sent to a new school. Isabella writes:

> *She [Ann] missed her old school and friends; her reading and writing slowed down. Because her home life had fallen apart she did not feel safe with reading and writing. She was not safe anymore and was not*

> *interested in school the way she was when she know other children. She felt like an outcast. Ann was very angry with her mother. . . ."*

Isabella then describes the experience that showed Sally how writing could help her. Isabella writes:

> *The teacher taught Ann and Cindy how writing could help them to get their feelings out. Ann also learned it was good to read, so she could fantasize about her life. This really helped her to get back what she had lost when her parent split up. Through the process of writing she wrote many stories about the separation of her parents, which helped her to heal. Ann said, "I know I can never forget the lesson of love, life and strength which I caught a strong glimpse of in my second grade year. I am thankful to this day for every moment of that years of experience. Life may not alway go as smoothly as I would like it to be but I know I can always learn and survive what may come along the way."*

Isabella then compared her experience to Ann's and concludes with a plea to parents: *so if you see that your child is in pain or rebelling help that child. Talk and be a good listener, so that your child does not end up not wanting to read or write*. While the paper appeared to be focused on the use of writing and reading to deal with childhood crisis, the conclusion deals with the general issue of motivation around reading and writing. Thus, the conclusion seems more connected to the class's general topic of discussion than the particulars of this essay. The writer understands expectations but does not have the authority to synthesize her particular experiences.

In comparison, Sally wrote with extensive detail the history of Isabella's experiences with family abuse, and reading and writing:

> *By the second grade, Mary's grades had dropped and her father began to beat her with the end of a long hard leather barber strap*

against her soft bare behind for each low grade she received. The abuse for Mary was so bad that she didn't know how to spell her last name or write the abc's. Mary had totally withdrew from learning. . . .The more and more the mental and physical abuse grew, Mary wanted no more than to die. Death to Mary was the freedom from the mental, emotional, and physical abuse.

The only way Mary survived this ordeal was from the block she created in her mind that protected her from painful memories of abuse. The block in Mary's mind has kept her with us today. . . [Sally describes the process of recovery and the return to school.] Mary had a hard time in school at first but she realized that learning to read and write again would help her bring down the block of painful memories. Mary has found that expressing her feelings through a journal has been the best way to bring down the block of pain.

Bringing the paper and pen together has also brought Mary together with her feelings and she knows that she will not have to hear the negative words she heard from her father again. If Mary is bothered by something, she knows that the pen and paper can help her express her feelings openly. The freedom to read and write has brought the joy within Mary out into a world where she can feel safe.

A block of hurtful memories can have a tremendous effect on a person's well being. The most important part of a mental block is that it is there for a reason and finding the reason is the key to working through the fear and pain. Mary found the opening to her block and has begun to work through it with the help of reading and writing. Reading and writing has become Mary's friends and she spends a great deal of time with them.

> *. . . Mary went back to school because it was a safe place for her to express her feelings about her childhood through reading and writing, and school can be a safe place for other children or adults to express their feelings if they just have a chance to feel the joy through reading and writing.*

Sally's conclusion, in contrast to Isabella's, uses experience to make her conclusion. She makes the connection between school as a safe place to deal with feelings through reading and writing. I can not help but wonder how this strong sense of the purpose and power of writing affected their motivation. In terms of attendance, homework, journal work, and participation, they were two of the strongest students in the class.

Susan

A writer who has trouble being honest about her experiences with reading and writing

Another example of using similarity to explore the subject is Susan's paper. She chose to interview her mother. In the draft, she said that she wanted to interview her mother because of her different experiences, but in the final paper she emphasized the similarity of their experiences. I want to include a section of the essay here because I think it provides not only information about Susan's attitudes toward reading and writing but about Susan's experiences with these subjects:

> *Most of my mothers experience with reading and writing took place in high school. As she remembers, she hated to write more than she did to read. It was the most terrible thing for her to do. Everytime she had to write a journal or a bookreport, she always had trouble because she felt that she wasn't a good enough speller. My mother was lousy in spelling and figured the teacher reading her journals and bookreports would laugh at her. My mother always felt embarrasd about her handwriting and spelling. What she figured most was not*

> *makeing sense in any of her papers. She was never good at writing but she was better at reading. She really enjoys intersting things rather than boaring things. Mostly my mother enjoyed reading love poems. Writing for he wasn't so fun. My mother was a bad speller and had sloppy pinmenship. . . . In her English class, she had to write and read a lot. . . .She feared doing that because my mother feared that she didn't write about the main idea of the story and felt that the main idea was misunderstood. . . . At times when she was in english class, she'd fell her face turn red when she was up infront of the class reading. She could feel all her classmates staring at her and watching as she continued reading. To her that was the worst. . . .*
>
> *I could imagine how my mother felt, because I felt the same way but probbly worse. By comparing my experience with my mothers, shows me how much alike we are. Everything she felt when she was reading out loud, I felt the same thing. Now today we both are ok with reading and writing. I actually think it's fun and good practice. As for my [m]other she feels the same, but she rather write because she says it's easy because you don't have to understand what you write.*

This paper concerned me because I felt, in comparison to the others, the writer seemed to be trapped in her perceptions of herself and her similarity to her mother. I was concerned for Susan all semester. This paper is significant in its lack of purpose and its lack of a process of making meaning from the situation. The paper is similar to others like Lucas's and Elito's that sought reinforcement of their own experience; however, the paper lacks the honesty and the concluding comments that reflect the writer's authority to interpret experience.

Lynne
A writer who was affected by the honesty of classroom discussion

The honest talk that contributes to critical thinking does not come easily. Lynne observes in her paper that people are not always comfortable talking about reading and writing. She first compares her experiences to that of her younger sister, who is a successful reader and writer in school. Then she attempts to interview a 14-year-old boy who she knows has trouble with reading and writing. Lynne writes,

> *I wanted to interview him because I knew he has trouble with his reading. I wanted to hear a negative response to see if it would relate to my experience. . . I could understand why he turned the interview down. I was never comfortable talking about my reading to anyone. My reading is something personal, and I feel ashamed to say that I'm not a good reader to someone who loves to read.*

For some, this honest expression of attitudes toward reading and writing was more than interesting; it was freeing, as the following paragraph from Lynne's paper illustrates:

> *It is interesting to see how just a few people can have a completely different opinion towards reading and writing. How one question can turn into a thousand answers, because everyone carries his or her own experience with them. As I listened to the essays of the other students in class, it gave me a chance to see that I wasn't the only one who had a difficult time with reading and writing. I always thought to myself that I couldn't do as good as the other students because they were better readers than I was, but in the long run, everyone had there own problems with reading or writing. For some students, they enjoyed reading more than writing. As for the others, they found writing more pleasing to them. I was one who wasn't particularly interested in*

> *reading. Especially when I was younger, I never heard a student mention that they had difficulties with either subject. Now that both subjects are an issue in class, many of the students are finding it easier to express their experiences in class. Mainly myself, because I was never able to talk about reading to anyone because I was ashamed of what others would say or think.*

Lynne describes here the personal problem solving that can begin to happen when an individual reflects on school experiences. Recognizing that individuals have had different experiences with reading and writing seems obvious, but it wasn't part of most students' thinking. Socially accepted attitudes about reading and writing had dominated their thinking. Only when they accepted this range of experiences and began to place themselves and their experiences in the spectrum did they begin to think about how these experiences might have affected their current attitudes. Critical problem solving grows out of an honest look at one's experience, which grows out of accepting one's individuality in a diverse community. It would be misleading to think that the expression of experiences related to this topic automatically implied problem solving, successful problem solving. As one component in this class, as one subject that student discussed in depth, this unit of work led to further thinking and changes in behavior, as noted in the next sections of data.

Lynne indicates that reading and writing about this topic can help individuals become more aware of their attitudes and their family and communities. In her introduction, Lynne implies that reading and writing are tools for understanding experience. She writes, *We must continue to learn to read and write because we can't depend on anything or anyone else. We can only depend on our own experiences and what we decide to make of them.* This last sentence implies not just reading and writing but an awareness and valuing of the interpretive process.

Concluding Comments

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, my understanding of students learning to read and write in the classroom has been influenced in large part by interactionist theories of literacy as well as the social-epistemic theories of composition. These theories focus on the ways in which social interaction influences individual processes of language use, of creating meaning from experience. Therefore, this section of data is a picture of both what students brought to class in terms of attitudes and experiences with reading and writing and how classroom interaction affected individual interpretive processes. Whereas the emphasis of the social epistemic theorists has been on critical social analysis, my approach in this particular assignment was to promote research that encouraged analysis of reading and writing situations, but allowed for students' individual methods. I then studied the ways students went about this project to identify the analytical approaches that they used. My insights are organized according to what I can interpret about the students' "purpose" and the students' "authority." Purpose reflects the students perception of "what I am trying to do in this assignment," and "authority" reflects the students' confidence in synthesizing information, the "what can I say about this information I have collected?" As noted in this section of the data, many factors affect interpretation of a situation, in this case literacy.

Individuals are influenced by the people around them. I have chosen to look at the interpretive strategies of students in terms of purpose and authority. By "purpose" I mean the motivation that directs the interpretation of experience. As academics, we assume an understood analytical stance for researching a subject and writing a research paper. However, these students have not yet been introduced to this stance, so they bring with them and get from class discussion individual reasons for writing about the topic.

Dominant social beliefs and attitudes affect students' writing, their work with purpose, critical thinking, and authority. If writing is to be used to explore our world, our thinking, and ourselves, writers must be able to question social attitudes and norms, especially when these attitudes do not reflect individuals' experiences. One attitude that dominates our world and our schools is the value of reading and writing and thus, in a sense, the devaluing of those who do not successfully participate in the community of readers and writers. Often, it is assumed by teachers that students need to be "convinced" of the importance of reading and writing. I find students are well aware of the importance reading and writing play in our world. Dorothy titles her paper "Reading is Important," and in the following introduction, Lynne articulates this commonly accepted attitude:

> *As we all Know, {the capitalization is hers} reading and writing are important for our everyday living. Whether it is reading the daily news paper to keep up with what is happening, a school homework assignment to know what to do, or simply reading a memo at work. It is important for each of us to keep up with reading and writing even though technology is getting better as the years come. We may have computers to do our work for us, but a human has to compute the information in order for the computer to program correctly. Otherwise, a computer would be of no use.*

Lynne expresses the attitudes that dictate the necessity of literacy for basic survival. However, this passage also reflects some confusion. What does Lynne mean, *"It is important for each of us to keep up with reading and writing even though technology is getting better as the years come"?* Are reading and writing not seen as part of technology? She seems ambivalent about how reading and writing relate to technology and progress.

After discussion, in their papers students presented both the idea that reading and writing are connected to survival and the idea that people relate to reading and writing in very different ways. In order to explore the subject seriously, students had to place their experiences in a context that recognized both dominant social views of literacy and the reality of people's experiences. Recognizing divergent opinions was not entirely a rational actitivity; emotions played into it. When the class discussed the subject of reading and writing, some students were quite judgmental about Thomas's uncle, who didn't want to talk about the subject of reading. They called him names and said he must be lazy. Students seemed threatened by this person who did not value reading, yet many students admitted to their perfunctory interest in reading.

Observing the kind of sharing that occurred around this topic, I saw that individuals needed an opportunity and the freedom to be honest about this subject. Students uncovered and discovered feelings and attitudes in order to explore the personal meaning of reading and writing. Working with diversity encouraged recognition of different attitudes and experiences. The discussions around reading and writing gave students a strong sense of the variety of human experience. Five students (Thomas, John, Lynne, Dorothy, and Connie) made comments in their final drafts that reflected not just a sense of comparison, but a sense of the diversity of attitudes. John's introduction summarizes his observations about attitudes; this paragraph is also a basic summary of class discussion:

> *Some people do not find reading and writing that easy. Others, reading and writing is their sixth sense. Some people find it challenging and difficult to start to read and write. Others are disappointed to put down a book or pen. Learning the mechanics and proper formats has also been an area of trouble for some people. Whether it is because they did not attend school, or it was hard to ask questions about proper techniques. Others around may have been intimidating instead of encouraging. It could also be that they are just plainly not interested in reading or writing. To these people reading and writing could be more of a hassle*

> *rather than pleasure. There are so many different examples of what reading and writing is and is not to people.*

This feeling for diversity is also expressed in Connie's paper when she writes, *It is becoming increasingly clear to me that not every person's experiences with reading and writing is the same as mine and this assignment-is opening my eyes to the differences.* Recognizing and working with multiple perspectives (diversity) is a critical step in the critical-thinking process. Students' reactions to other perspectives encouraged them to reflect on, analyze, and evaluate their opinions and attitudes.

My purpose for this assignment was for students to investigate reading and writing issues in their family or community. I hoped students would think critically about their experiences and their environments. This data picture shows the conflict I felt when I hoped for critical social analysis. On first reading of these papers, I did not see the type of thinking or the language I expected. My reaction was that the students were not "researching," were not questioning. I began to see the complex interaction among my expectations, the students' understanding of the assignment, and classroom discussion. As I watched encounters among students and traced the movement of an idea through discussions and writings, I began to understand and appreciate the individuality of student approaches to this assignment.

Students were listening to me. They were even using words that I had encouraged. I had emphasized the process as one of exploration and discovery. Several students' texts referred to "discoveries" and "surprises." Although they listened and followed my suggestions, students had come to this class with interpretive habits and personal agendas. I had to rethink the conflict I was feeling. I was struck by Angela's story of the teacher who wanted the student to do what the teacher thought was important rather than read Edgar Allen Poe. The purpose of this assignment was to encourage awareness of the interpretive process. In future assignments these students would be writing summaries, reaction papers, multiple-perspective papers, and editorials; they would be working with deductive thinking. Here I wanted to see and understand their interpretive processes, how they worked with language to write an essay, to create meaning. I must admit that my appreciation for what many of the students were doing came after the semester was over when I reread and studied these writings.

These papers gave me valuable pictures of the communities my students live in, their interpretations of experiences, and the methods/approaches of analysis that they brought to the classroom. For this project, no one interviewed a stranger; everyone chose friends, co-workers, or family members. I think the selection of the person interviewed may have indicated inner dialogues that became expressed through the process of researching and writing. In some cases the questions were already there before the assignment. Carmela had put much thought into this concern about hers sons' attitudes toward education. Angela also indicated the question was one she had struggled with for years. In other cases, I don't think that students had thought explicitly about reading and writing because they had not been asked to articulate their ideas on the subject.

These first papers, being more open-ended and coming early in the semester, reflected individual, personal approaches to the subject. When John wrote this paper, he discovered questions through reflection on his family's reading behaviors. Some students like Isabella sought to understand the frustration experienced in their families. Some students needed to reinforce their perceptions of writing as healing. Others sought reinforcement for their goals and the efforts they have put into education. Other students were challenged to understand different attitudes when relatives hated school and reading. At the same time students such as Thomas and Lucas used the assignment to strengthen their resolve for completing their education. The purpose in some papers was not clear, and its absence was a statement. The personal nature of the research process provided critical insight into my students and the communication involved in introducing students to new ways of using writing. In cases where students seemed extremely off-track with an interpretation of the assignment, it was helpful to consider their purposes/ goals as well as mine. These assignments also reinforced my belief in the processes of discussion.

My interest in this portion of the data is in what it revealed about the social nature of critical literacy. Understanding what these writings reveal requires that they be seen in the context in which they were created. The social nature of language and thought have been discussed by Vygotsky (1986, 1978), Bakhtin (1986, 1981), and Wertsch (1991, 1985). Whereas a great deal of research on this topic refers to intertextuality, effects of other texts, my observations recognize the role of classroom interaction in the construction of meaning. The form of this data documents writing in the context of classroom interaction and illustrates the movement of ideas. In this situation early in the semester, the textbook and other written materials were not as effective in generating critical thinking as the words of other classmates. John takes ideas from Angela; Isabella and Sally share an interpretation; Thomas, John, and Lynne-to name a few-refer to ideas mentioned in classroom discussion. Bakhtin and Wertsch contrast "authoritative texts" and "internally persusasive discourse"(Bakhtin 1981; Wertsch 1991). At this point in their education, students reacted to (were "internally persuaded" by) dialogue with other students rather than "authoritative texts." A variety of historical factors play into this situation: comfort, trust, safety, openness. The fact is that students did interact, borrow, and rewrite with each others' ideas. These critical-thinking and communication skills were carried into work with texts later in the semester. The effect of classroom interaction in generating reflection, critical thinking, and awareness of multiple perspectives was a key observation of this section of the data.

I also attempted to understand through these papers and student interactions the concept of "authority" and how it may influence interpreting situations and making concluding comments. Typically, conclusions are a problem for basic writers. Most students were only comfortable writing and drawing conclusions about a specific situation. The students who were able to conclude with strong opinions for the reader had been reinforced and/or supported at some point in the process by other class members so that they had the confidence to make more universal statements. For example, Angela had tested her paper on the class. She knew that others agreed with her ideas about readers and non-readers. Sally and Isabella had reinforced each other about the role of reading and writing in relation to childhood trauma; they could then make a statement to the world. Thomas, who had faced a strong adverse reaction by classmates to his uncle who didn't want to discuss reading, could not make strong concluding remarks about his friends and relatives who seemed to have attitudes that were not as socially acceptable. He could only reinforce the value of reading and the decisions he had made about eduction. The personal/psychological complexity of his situation deserves recognition. One may not easily analyze and pass judgment on people close to one.

I noticed from the writings and discussion in this class that a student's "authority," (i.e., that sense of valuing one's interpretation or one's ideas) was influenced by a growing awareness that individuals did not all fit into the social norm. When students became comfortable with the individual nature of experience, they could look more honestly at their experiences. Thus, working with diversity allowed for more description of real experience. However, the appreciation of diversity did not provide most writers with authority to make strong concluding comments from personal experience.

In terms of how this assignment fit in the context of the course, I believe that the honesty expressed encouraged serious habits of reflection in many students that matured with the semester. For these students, dialogue and critical thinking began with reaction to others in the class, and it was carried into specific reading and writing experiences later in the semester. The reaction paper, multiple-perspective paper, and the editorial at the end of semester reflected more social consciousness, more social analysis, as a result of students' exposure to writing, reading, and discussion. Comments in journals and other writings, which will be looked at in the next sections, indicate that the use of writing for personal as well as social problem solving began with honest description of experience, feelings, and attitudes in the context of classroom discussion. Understanding the complexity of "purpose" and "authority" and the role of classroom interaction in these assignments has been critical to my understanding of students' intellectual growth through writing.

Section 3
Writings about Writing and Reading in this Class

Background/Theory

While the last sections focused on students' first two writing assignments, their history, and community/family attitudes toward reading and writing, this section focuses on what students wrote about reading and writing in this course, those comments that illustrate students' conscious awareness of reading and writing as processes which affect thinking, feeling, and behavior. I am particularly interested in the places where students articulate a personal sense of the meaning of reading and writing. In some cases, I interpret the situation, proposing that a student's writing reflects his use of writing as a personal problem-solving activities. In most cases, students themselves articulate their thoughts about reading and writing. Most of these writings were done as the semester progressed, so students were working within the context of an ongoing discussion of these subjects.

The feelings and attitudes that students have about reading and writing have been shaped by their culture, schooling, families, and personalities. Brandt (1994) has emphasized the need for information about how individuals relate to reading and writing. Referring to previous research, she writes, "The interest is in how people make meaning *through* reading and writing. Only incidentally might these studies consider how people make meaning *of* reading and writing" (460). As a teacher/researcher, I am very aware that how individuals relate to the meaningfulness of these activities and their confidence with these activities affects their motivation. As Brandt puts it, "We must understand better what is compelling literacy as it is lived" (477). Whereas Brandt's research works at understanding "others," this research has the duel purpose of presenting a picture of these students' histories and at the same time providing the students with an opportunity, with the tools, to understand themselves, their own histories, and attitudes. My hope here is to provide a method of shifting some of the interpretive process to students, enabling them to be subjects rather than objects of educational writing.

Teaching and learning involve the whole person, emotions and attitudes as well as intellectual development and basic skills. Language scholars (Fulwiler 1986, 1982; Moffet 1982; Vygotsky 1986, 1978) have recognized that individuals use language in informal ways to make meaning of their experiences. Some of the writing in this section falls into the category of "inner speech" (Vygotsky 1986, 1978) or self-talk, writing that reflects attempting to understand the situation, problem solving, and goal setting. Because the first two assignments emphasized histories and attitudes related to reading and writing, several students carried these concerns through the course. Journal assignments and in-class free writings encouraged the ongoing contemplation of these concerns. Current theories around experiential learning, educational biographies, and journal work provide insights into these data.

Using writing to reflect on past and present experiences with reading and writing provides many insights into the relationship of experience and learning as well as insights into how concepts and attitudes change and develop. Writing may document a process of reflection on experiences. An interesting collection of writings in the book Using Experience for Learning edited by Boud, Cohen, and Walker raises questions about what and how we learn from experience. These authors suggest that individuals create meanings from experiences that may be then continually reinforced, creating a pattern or habit of behavior. Thus, the way learning experiences are perceived is a pattern of interpretation. Sometimes this activity is positive; other times it is negative. Denis Postle believes that our culture has a bias favoring the intellectual and the practical, often ignoring the emotional aspects of learning. He writes that "distressed, distorted, or omitted learning from childhood affects current learning situations" (1990, 38). He believes that it is critical for adults to reflect on the experiences that influence their current attitudes, and that we recognize the emotional as well as the intellectual and practical. David Boud and David Walker also emphasize the importance of reflection on experience (1993). They believe it is not experience that teaches, but perception and reflection of that experience. In discussing the work of John Dewey, they write, "What then makes experience educative? It is surely not the quality of the experience itself but the quality given it by the learner. Unless an experience is examined and reflected on, it has no educative value"(40). This statement seems extreme; however, the value of looking/reflecting on past educational experiences in this situation gave students a variety of strong insights during the process of this research. Discussions and writing around school and family experiences connected to reading and writing created awareness and concern with present-day attitudes that in several cases continued through the semester, affecting behavior as well as attitude.

Use of writing to reflect on life experiences is not new. Stephen Brookfield discusses the development of critical thinking through written biographies (1990). He writes, "In helping people recognize and analyze their assumptions, the scrutiny of critical incidents from learners' biographies is an accessible and personalized approach"(192). He believes that important critical thinking involves awareness of the assumptions underlying the daily decisions and conflicts that learners face. Pierre F. Dominice works specifically with educational biographies, adult educators, and adult learners writing about their learning histories (1990). He notes that writing about past educational experiences develops in individuals a sense of the authority of personal experience and the use of critical thinking in terms of one's own experience.

Dominice is also concerned with the individual's sense of the purpose or meaningfulness of learning. He writes, "Adults do not change their attitudes or behaviors mechanically as a result of teaching; learning implies a reorganization of former knowledge"(211). Students need to use language to work with the changes stimulated by the learning environment. Joseph Lukinsky in "Reflective Withdrawal

Through Journal Writing," discusses the use of informal journal writing as a method of stepping back from experience of conversing with the self (1990). Lukinsky refers to the four categories of writing done in Ranier's (1978) New Diary: "catharsis, description, free-intuitive writing, and reflection." The journal assignments that students wrote for this course fall into these same categories. Students were asked to express emotions and reaction, describe classroom and personal experiences, free associate, and reflect on experiences related to the course as well as other topics. The journal work in this course was also influenced by the ideas of Toby Fulwiler, who has emphasized the use of informal writing and journals in varied courses as a writing across the curriculum strategy (1987). Writing provides a space for thinking about and working with the learning experience, its history, and its currenty reality.

Although this section focuses on students' comments about their experiences with reading and writing, we can not separate this individual process from what went on in the classroom. Themes that ran through classroom discussions surface again and again in these writings. In their discussion of the barriers to reflection on experience, Boud and Walker write that the most effective way to overcome barriers and to see situations in new ways is to share experiences with others (1990). They discuss their observations that exposure to others' experiences and thinking is the most effective way to break out of old thought patterns. David Boud and David Walker discuss Habermas's idea that "rejects the dominant view of knowledge that is separate and discovered by the individual in favour of a knowledge that is constructed in communal action" (1990, 159). Student writings reflect the conversation that evolved and the group knowledge during the semester. Ideas were shared and disputed, and students reflected differently on their individual experiences as a result of these conversations.

Writing About Reading and Writing

In this section, with a few exceptions, I use journal entries and short in-class writings to pull together some stories, trace in students own words their experiences with the process of learning. Because students do not typically articulate a lot about the metacognitive, these comments are not extensive. Each story represents an individual history, a fear, a struggle, a discovery, a change. Reading some of the stories in this group, we can appreciate the individual twist each student has on learning, fears, problems, and successes.

The journals were varied; some students diligently did all the entries, while others did only a few. Carmela, Dorothy, Sally, and Connie did incredibly detailed work in their spiral notebooks. Mark's journal was a manila folder with a wild collection of loose papers, some containing math problems, some containing pearls of insight into his learning. Isabella wrote her journal in a floral cloth-covered book; she wrote in a large sprawling cursive, pouring out emotions about her childhood, her children, her life.

Journal topics covered a range of subjects, some directed and some free-choice. Journals and short in-class writings were exploratory writings, referred to as free-writing. The topics and questions encouraged catharsis, description, and reflection on the readings, the classroom, learning, and life. Some asked for specific comments on communication in the classroom and at work. Final journal assignments in the class again asked for comments on group work, classroom discussion, journals, grammar tests, discussion of grammar, and detailed writing about reading and writing in this course. Toward the end of the semester, students were asked to write on a classroom situation that stood out in their memory. They were also asked the last day to write on what was the most important thing they learned in the class.

While students commented on the value of grammar discussion, the teacher's explanations and comments on papers, and other activities in their writings, I have chosen to focus here on comments referring to attitudes and feelings about reading and writing. As in other sections, these informal writings often reflected thoughts and feelings that were not included in more formal writing. They also provided a place for personal thinking about the learning experiences that may be more metacognitive or may reflect personal struggles with the purpose of school, reading, and writing.

After teaching for years, I am fairly aware of my way of interpreting students and their individual learning situations. I tend not to group or generalize according to skill level as often as I group according to what I think of as "connectedness to learning." What I mean by this is whether a student seems to be involved with learning, to see and feel reading and writing as meaningful activities. Meaningfulness correlates in most cases to motivation. Students often make references to the reality that reading and writing are necessary to survive in the modern world and that they must have these skills to succeed in the work place. Quite often students who say or write this have not found personal meaning in these activities. I have also noticed how "connectedness to learning" is often a factor of confidence: "I can do this" versus "I have never been good at doing this." We see bright students fail to achieve their goals as we see students with limited skills succeed. Attitude toward learning is a critical factor.

Students' expressive informal writing helped me understand more about what compelled literacy. The following are student cases that illustrate the range of experiences in the class. I see in their writings a clear distinction between description of expectation and description of personal experiences. Describing expectations involves using the language the student has heard to describe goals the teacher defined. Descriptions of experience reflect students' finding language to describe the experience of learning, finding personal meaning in the activities of reading and writing. Susan and Adela both use writing to struggle in different ways with their disinterest and negative attitudes toward literacy. John, through reflection on his writing and classroom discussion, begins to use writing to look deeper at his dwindling motivation to read.

Mark expresses his fears and reflects on the writing process. A very different student is Elito, who has always found satisfaction in reading and writing. Although Sally writes sparingly, she describes a feeling for how reading and sharing writing affect the quality of her life. Isabella's journals continue the theme of writing as a way of working with childhood experiences to overcome self-doubt and make changes. Carmela expresses the vocational goals that motivate her, but also the fine-tuned insights she has gained from unstructured writing. These writings reflect a wide spectrum of attitudes. I hope to picture both what draws individuals to reading and writing as well as what is problematic.

Two students who were friends, Susan and Adela, had similar past experiences with reading and writing. Both Susan's and Adela's journals reflected their struggles to connect with reading and writing. Both make references to the "need" to read and write in order to succeed in the world, and both struggled to find personal meaningfulness these activities. Although similar in many ways, Adela was more outspoken, more honest about her discomfort with school and learning, while Susan expressed what she thought was expected. The comparison of their experiences provides insight into the use of language to work with attitudes toward learning. Adela was honest about her feelings and reacted to what other students said and wrote about their attitudes. Her journal writing, as well as her participation in class, changed quite dramatically through the semester. Susan, on the other hand, did not seem as honest in her journals about what she was experiencing, although she was honest about her history; she did not use the journal to engage in reflection, comparisons, or problem solving. Adela began to "connect" to her writing, do her assignments, write thoughtfully in her journal. Adela passed the course; Susan did not.

Susan

A writer who writes that she is having fun but does not seem to be having fun

Susan described her history with learning when she wrote:

> *My first experience with writing was terrible. While I was learning to write in kindergarden, I had a hard time. It seemed as if everyone was learning faster than me. I felt like the odd one only because it took me longer to get the trick to write and spell. I always though putting sentences together was fun. It was like game to me therefore It was great big challenge and that's what kept me going.*

Susan describes a situation at home when she writes:

> *I asked questions to my mother about reading and writing, and what she thought about it. . . . I got a lot of response from her and both of our feelings are very similar. . . . She really didn't care for writing, but reading to her was easier than writing.*

Several weeks later in her journal, she describes the cycle of disinterestedness along with the behaviors she sees as necessary for success:

> *The only thing that I feel keep people from writing are not being intersted. If a person isn't interested in something, then they won't bother with it. Also if their afraid of asking questions about how to do or write somethings then they'll never know. I feel over all that if you don't take the time to practice and learn, then you won't be interested.*

Notice that when Susan moves into writing about the present and lack of interest, she does not use the first person, I. She uses "people" and "a person." I find it interesting that she puts "the time and practice" before being interested here, implying that discipline leads to engagement. Susan did not connect to reading as a meaningful activity; she did not read the assignments for class. She continually refers to reading as "boring" and "not interesting." For the journal entry which asked her to describe the textbook, Susan wrote, *NO COMMENT DIDN'T find the Engaging Reader interesting.*

The characteristic of Susan's journal work that stands out among this group of students is its "sweet" quality. She did not express frustration. She often wrote that the class, discussion, writing, reading, were "good" or "fun," yet she was not engaged enough to do the reading on her own before class. She writes that honesty is helpful in the following journal entry: *My feelings about the essay `Audre Lorde' were true. I feel that the author is write. When you write your true feelings and honest, you feel better."* {She continually makes this spelling error, a confusion between "write" and "right."} Susan does not, however, seem able to be honest in her writing. Too often she used the word "fun" when it did not seem appropriate to what she was experiencing. I don't know how to measure Susan's experience in the class. Although she didn't pass, she stayed with the class until the end. When asked to write what she learned from the class, she wrote, *I learned that writing is fun and I shouldn't be afraid of it. I also learned more about using the word processor and getting comfortable with it. Most of all I got familiar with essay and the body of an essay. I learned IDC[independent clauses] and DC[dependent clauses].* Susan was not happy that she did not pass the class, but I think that both she and Adela realized that others in the class spent more time reading and working on papers. They both mentioned to me that they saw in the class how hard people worked and understood that re-writing, re-reading, and studying were necessary. I believe the lack of connection between her experience and her writing prevented her from using writing as problem-solving activity the way Adela used journal writing.

Adela

A student who uses writing to work through problems and attitudes and to change behaviors

Adela's story reflects her interaction with attitudes expressed in class as well as her honesty in writing. Susan and Adela appeared to have similar attitudes in the beginning of the class. However, Adela's journal writings were not "sweet" and were descriptive of her feelings; they reflected her particular struggles with a history of disinterestedness. As seen in the last section, her paper about community attitudes was an angry discussion of class and race in the educational system, her parents' opinion as much as her own. In her early journal entries, her handwriting is scrawled loosely on the page, a stream-of-consciousness flow. Describing what happened in the 7th and 8th grades, she wrote the following in her journal:

> *But it all comes back to things that I am most interested about. If I don't like what I'm reading I see no point in it. I either look at T.V. or listen to the radio. I know that I don't find entertainment in reading, again only if I'm interested. I also don't find reading pleasurable. I guess people are different and its the way you were brought up.*

Notice the responsibility placed here on the family, *its the way you were brought up.* As the class progressed with more discussions on the topic, Adela focuses in her journals on the other students, what she considered the shared experience that home situations were responsible for a lack of interest in reading. Adela wrote,

> *It seems like most of us in the class feel the same way about reading and writing. I see that some are more interested than other and they all say it's because of the way they were brought up or it was really never a thing to do. Most had not had chances for reading and writing yet we all different attitudes and feelings towards reading and writing. Some are more visual than logic. Some just can't comprehend such things. Just like I can't. We all feel that T.V. and radio have a lot to do with it. We should concentrate on our education a little more. Because in some cases noone cares. You have to care before anyone can care for you.*

I notice in this entry her use of the word "most." I ask myself whether that was the perception I had of the class? No, my perception was that one or two, not "most," blamed family. Many students seemed uncomfortable with blaming and worked at understanding attitudes in their homes and schools. Carmela was outspoken about her family's lack of support and her own feelings about getting an education. Elito spoke about the opportunites in American education, and Sally and Isabella emphasized how they had motivated themselves to learn. The last sentence in the above entry from Adela's writing reflects the beginnings of a shift, a move toward action, moving from history to the present. Later in her journal, Adela continues to struggle with blaming others and this idea of individual responsibility for learning and attitude:

> *Sometimes it has to do with the way you grew up. Was it [reading] ever enforced? Was it not? and so on. I also think its up to the individual too as he/she gets older. If he/she don't want help, just try and get it anyway because education is very important. Some people just grow a love for it and other dispize it. Some just can't get into it and want to and others just can't care how they go about or if they get around it. Some want to learn to get the meaning out of the story but just don't see it. It's a natural and entertaining thing to some. Some do it for pleasure others to relief stress.*

Adela's use of the word "enforced" shows this effort to understand what happens in other homes to make a difference. She does not understand reading as [illegible]asurable family activity. In the entry just quoted, Adela is listing many of the ideas about reading brought up in class. The voices of other students seem to be echoing in her mind. We can hear Angela's fear and anger as well as Dorothy and Carmela's love of reading. We can hear John's thesis about reading as entertainment and relief of stress. Adela is struggling to understand the purpose/meaning of reading by working with the voices of the other students.

When the themes of the classroom are described and reacted to, we can see the importance of both the individual process of journaling and the group process of discussion working together. Adela is working with her perception and inner dialogue about past experiences with the awareness of other students' histories and attitudes that she had experienced in class. Several entries later, she again returned to the topic of the family and literacy when she wrote:

> *I was brought up differently from Renee. I never had to read because it wasn't something that we did in the house. It was doing our chores or doing our homework and after we did both we could watch T.V. all we wanted. I think thats why I'm having such a hard time now trying to comprehend some of the things that I'm reading and learning how to write papers.*

With a mixture of conflicting comments, Adela's first paper emphasized how her family had encouraged reading. Her second paper was an almost verbatim discussion from her parents about injustice. Adela has moved from first creating the rosy picture about reading at home she thought was expected, to voicing her parents' words on the topic too in her journal, reaching for her own authority, honest description of her experience. In these entries, she asked herself "Why am I not interested?" and "Why don't I comprehend what I read?" and "Who is responsible for this situation?" Adela's work for the class took a dramatic shift in the second half of the semester. Her journal entries continually became more honest and were more carefully written. Her handwriting reflected care when compared to the earlier entries. The struggle with school was still present; however, the focus had shifted. The following is an entry written at the end of the semester:

> *When it comes to reading I don't mind as much as I do writing. I guess because I don't know what to do about going about it. I know that I have to now, and I have to have to. It wasn't like before where I really didn't have to as much. It wasn't important then as it is now. Before I never used to like doing anything especially reading and writing. . . . The only*

> *time I like writing is when I write feelings or when I have to write a letter. Otherwise I can't let go. I don't know what's wrong. I've never had a good experience with writing. Ever. If I don't like what I'm reading I don't get the whole meaning out of it. . . . I'm sure that I'm able to write a good paper. I can't get my mind to thinking in some situations. . . .People are different. Some people either have a love for it or they just don't. Others never had that opportunity opened to them. It is also up to the individual, It's better late than never. Never say you didn't try.*

Several sentences in this passage reflect the shift in Adela's journal from questions of blaming to action. She takes responsibility and is focusing on the work. She is aware that it is *up to the individual* and that she needs to focus on the present rather than the past–*It's better late than never.* She recognizes that she gets more meaning from readings that she is interested in. She also recognizes the situations in which she likes writing. She is analyzing the circumstances carefully rather than looking for excuses. These journal entries worked, I believe, as a method of expressing feelings, comparing and reflecting on attitudes, and setting goals. Adela worked hard the last part of the semester. When asked to write on the last day what was the most important thing learned in the class, she wrote the following:

> *I think the most important thing I learned in this class is that I could be honest.*
> *I was able to express my feelings freely.*
> *I learned to write a little better than I had before.*
> *I learned to feel confident (with the teachers help), with my papers and myself.*
> *I learned not getting my papers in on time would drop me down to a lower grade.*
> *I learned to communicate well with my teacher and feel comfortable with her.*
> *I learned to get a little more motivated with myself and my schooling.*

I would describe the change in Adela's handwriting, like the changes in the content of her journal, by saying that she is more connected to what she is putting on the paper; the activity has personally meaningful. She took on the responsibility for her attitudes and her learning. I think it is interesting that she noted first being **"honest"** and being able to **"express my feelings freely."** In contrast to a student who writes what he thinks is expected, Adela wrote about her attitudes, comparing and reflecting on them in the context of the classroom. Journal writing became a meaningful activity, a way of working with her questions and struggles. Recognizing a situation as something to analyze and problem solve starts with writing that is honest about feelings and experiences. What do I mean by "honest?" I do not mean in this case to imply honesty as a character trait or something easy to achieve. However, honesty as a characteristic of writing deserves attention and further research. When an individual can admit and write about experiences that are troublesome, the individual can use writing as a problem-solving tool. The way writing is understood plays a critical role in its use as a tool for problem solving and human development.

John

A student who discovers different ways to use writing and learns that writing can surprise the writer

Each individual's struggle with motivation is unique. Whereas Adela had a history of disinterest and problems with school, John wrote his first paper on being highly motivated and doing extremely well at certain times in his school history. However, his motivation was not consistent. He wrote honestly in his second paper as well as his letter to the editor (an assignment) of his problems with reading-not the skills, but the motivation. He wrote the following about the confusion of feelings he has regarding education:

> *Education is something that I need to get more of a grasp on. The want is there for me, but I can not find the motivation, the funds to get more classes. The sound of having a college degree sounds good in my ears. It is a positive step for me that I am striving to get. But there are tons of obstacles that seem to halter my path to a higher education.*

Students share the social value put on education and reading. However, the reality of doing the work is something else. Students have different circumstances. Although he came to class prepared, John struggled because he worked long hours in a restaurant. In the passage above he considers "motivation" and "funds" in the same sentence. He needed money to go to school, and he needed not to work such hours. The economic reality of many community college students is a consideration. John was a strong student through most of the semester, but work demands meant that he missed classes toward the end of the semester.

Each student has a different lesson to learn, and each student finds his own lesson. John came from a private school and had good basic skills. However, after starting to explore his attitude toward reading in his second paper, he was consciously concerned with his attitude toward reading, making references to his lack of interest in reading. In his letter to the editor, he wrote the following:

> *I learned there was a part of me that could enjoy to read and write [referring to the book]. I mentally felt I was unable to enjoy either while learning. I also learned that there is more to reading and writing than just a bunch of words. The way words are put together can change the whole meaning. I feel that I can for once write an essay that I am actually saying what I believe rather than what I think someone wants to hear.*

I find the comment about being honest particularly interesting. There was a major shift in terms of John's honest description of experience and attitude from the first paper to the later writings. I believe that being truthful about his attitude allowed John to explore his attitude through writing.

John did an interesting "reaction writing" during this course. Occasionally I have students free-write after hearing other students' papers. When students had heard several of the second papers read aloud and then were writing their reactions, I asked them to write about the feelings that came up while listening. After hearing his paper about his parents' attitudes toward reading read aloud, John wrote the following:

> *In listening to someone else read my paper I felt as though I found out why my mom was never one to be open. She holds it in and I realized why she always seemed upset or aggrevated. It sounded like someone else's words and I heard more than I wrote. I found out alot about experiences I not only had but some that shape other people's lives.*

John was so surprised at what he heard when I read his paper that he was very vocal about this free-write, this insight. He heard the story/experience in a different way, on a different level than he thought writing it. This experience indicates how sometimes a writer is expressing more than she is consciously aware. This passage shows an experience with both the unconscious and the reflective quality of writing that makes writing such a powerful tool for human growth and meaning-making. John's experiences emphasize the potential of writing when it works with honest expression of experience and when it enables one to reflect on experience in new way.

Mark
A writer who used language to wrestle with fears and understand his learning style

Each story is an individual combination of circumstances and personality. While some students deal with motivation, others wrestle with fear. Mark wrote several times about how his college-educated parents emphasized learning and school, yet he had to discover learning himself many years later. Mark's challenges in writing were different than many of the other students. He had an extensive vocabulary of words, ideas and experiences. However, he lacked confidence in his voice, and his thinking often jumped all over the page. From the first day of class, Mark wanted absolutes. He liked comma rules and had trouble with the ambiguity of ideas. He wrote in his journal:

> *My parents were both college grads so taking any homework to them for questions and solutions was no problem–infact I thought they were smarter than the teachers. . . . I'm one of the luckiest persons alive, I get a second chance. I was left a trust fund at the expense of death of grandparents and parents who I miss. . . . I went against their wishes about formal education and decided travel was for me.*

Now twenty-some years later, Mark has returned to the classroom. Mark's journal entries show his gradual conquering of fear around writing. The first week in the semester, he wrote the following:

> *I'm afraid, apprehensive, and curious about writing. I think to myself that I'll never understand how to or why I should write.*
>
> *I feel indifferent, yet curious about writing. Should I put a comma here, is there enough being said, or am I being specific, who cares what I have to say.*
>
> *The curious part in me, feels that I'm smart enough to conquor being afraid, I will alway be apprehensive about anything new and exciting and that with these feelings and attitudes I'm anxious to begin writing.*

Later in his journal he wrote, I'*ve learned to like English, not to let my fear get in the way. I will be succeed even if it takes the rest of my life. I've got time.*

The struggle goes on, and he writes toward the end of the semester the following:

> *Learning to conquer my fear of writing is my biggest obstacle. To deal*

with this problem, I've shoved aside my procrastinating ways, told myself to attend classes, and in the end I will have learned something. I found myself slowly understanding that there is art in English. It's an art to place commass, colons, semi-colons, periods and quotation marks. . .

Illustrating the challenge he faced, Mark wrote in another entry in his journal:

> *I hate not being able to do things. I know I'm smart enough to master anything that stands in my way. Its the fear of failing, I suppose, that leaves this void in me.*
>
> *When something that is an absolute, I feel relieved knowing that with the right teaching and help. I will master it.*
>
> *If I have a good solid base of information from which to draw from, I then and only then, feel comfortable about tackling projects that have unknown quantities. God, do I feel inadequate.*
>
> *I know now the mistakes of not going to school have had on my life and for the most part I've dealt with them. I can't change them and I feel lucky to have had so many experiences in my life.*
>
> *My quest for something new to enter my life is like a gene telling me to keep asking questions.*
>
> *Oh well, something will happen to take away this feeling of being stupid it always does! I know, I'll go to school.*

Sometimes it feels strange, invasive, reading such honest, personal expression. I feel as if I am seeing into someone's private life. However, I have watched Mark succeed, overcome the obstacles, reminding me that such writing may be a part of working with the writing process. His expression here gives insight into his use of language to struggle with school. Students who express feelings and attitudes honestly tend to use writing as problem-solving tool. (Often now, I do not read the journals as closely. Students mark pages they want me to see and fold those they want kept private).

The next entry quoted illustrates how expressive writing may move or lead into honest description of process. Mark gives a quite articulate description of organizing his thinking/writing. He writes:

> *My problems, in learning this new art form [writing] are many and the one I have the most difficulty with is my inability to stay focused on the subject at hand. My mind is constantly weaving bits and pieces of nonsense, that in order to acheive order I have to see the big picture first, then it goes about rearranging these pieces so that in the end I've solved the jigsaw puzzle and I've don it the hardest way possible . Stupid! . . .. English has taught me if I keep practicing, whether it's writing or sailing, eventually I'll get better at it.*

Mark's insights and the development of an understanding of what he is doing reflect a problem-solving attitude that leads him out of the maze, out of the fear. These writings mix the inner process and the outer behaviors necessary to move beyond fear and improve skills. His understanding of the need/challenge to see the whole piece of text rather than being caught up in the details shows important progress. He recognized his perceptual/learning mode, how he got caught up in the details, and how he must work with seeing the big picture of organization. When Mark understood his individual way of thinking, he could see what he must do to communicate with others.

Mark, as an older student who had not written in years, seemed particularly sensitive to what it feels like to write, both the struggle and the healing. Mark wrote the following response to the direction "Use your imagination to describe the writing process by comparing it to something else."

> *Writing is like. . .pulling teeth. The first thought is one of pain, but as I've noticed in class, if given the right tools; such as where commas are placed, periods, verb and subject tense, etc., The extraction is painless and once out in the open writing can heal a sore mind.*

The metaphor of pulling out what is inside is interestingly juxtaposed next to learning where "commas are placed." Mark has realized the healing potential of writing. Each time that I read this piece, I see him at the front desk of a large hotel in town, thinning hair, middle-aged. I remember his stories, his travels, his philosophy, his regrets. I remember his fear about writing and his success.

Elito

A student who has always enjoyed reading and writing

Elito is a student who has a strong connection to writing, although English is not his first language. He talked and wrote about how, from an early age, he loved stories and loved to write both stories and poems. Although the English language is a struggle, the writing is pleasurable, a meaningful activity. However, fears and frustrations are emotions that writers face. Students from other countries especially have fears around the use of a language foreign to them. Elito's description of early experiences with reading and writing in El Salvador did not have any association with fear, only success and rewards, but the English class he first took at the college frightened him. He wrote about it:

> *The first day that I got to class I was afraid that the teacher would say write about something or that she would call my name and said Elito read something... I think that the first time that I was in the states I feel that same way I was afraid of being away from my country. I did not know how things or people was going to be. I was afraid before moving. I can relate this experience with my first English class. I feel like running away from the States and from my classroom.*

Writing had alway been a meaningful activity for Elito. He had been in touch with other children all over the world through writing. His second paper had detailed descriptions of his childhood experience with pen pals. Writing today keeps him in touch with family. Elito wrote, *"I have a brother in Canada and alot of family in El Salvador and because of writing and reading we communicate real good."* Both Elito's early experiences and his current experiences with reading and writing have involved bridging places, connecting with people at a distance. However, Elito also has a love for creative writing, play with language. In the following journal entry, Elito describes the value of writing about past experiences with reading and writing as a way of conjuring up old feelings, of motivating himself, of reminding himself of experiences that were satisfying. Learning English has been a struggle. In the following, Elito describes his experience using the assignment to connect with his old feelings about writing. He wrote:

> *Just thinking of getting my paper and pencils again after thinking about reading and writing. A lot of ideas had come to mine mind after talking about writing. Thoughts of when I used to put everything on paper have cross my mind and I really feel like a need to write. Writing makes me happy. I get this big emotion after putting something on paper and knowing that I finished it is for a nice emotion. I like the way the writing has played a big role in my class. Not only the writing of paper for class, but the way that we get to go back to our experiences and think back when maybe we wrote something [He is referring to the first paper topics when students though back to earlier experiences with reading and writing]. I like to get that feeling again. Although is a little bit harder now to do in English, I still have the need for it and I thinking in doing it. I have already start with very small pieces and they are maybe too romantic.*

Elito's description of experiences with writing contrasts with others in its emotional connection to the process. This journal entry reflects the enjoyment Elito got from just thinking about his history with reading and writing. This entry also shows how positive experiences and memories are recalled in order to motivate one to get out paper and pencil. Elito's concern with specific skills often hid his lack of confidence. Elitos' attitude has more to do with confidence than actual fear. He wrote the following at the end of the semester about what he had learned:

> *To connect paragraph, sentence and to enjoy my writing... The organization of paragraphs is very important in writing and I have a beter idea how to do it. What is the most important thing I learned in this class? I'm not sure about which thing is the most important because there were a few things I know were important. I guess I have to give one, so I'm going to say confidence in English because before this class I did not think that I was going to be able to write in English.*

In class, Elito did not appear to lack confidence. His comment about confidence being the most important thing he learned surprised me.

Although Elito often wrote about writing as communication with family, when asked to write the imaginative piece comparing the writing process to something else, Elito chose the word "therapy." Elito wrote the following:

> *A therapy. I think of that because every time I write is like having a conversation to myself, especially if there is no subject involved in the writing. When topics are free my imagination was wild and free. But I think of writing been like a therapy when I feel sad, lonely, or if I don't have or can't find anything to do. I'll for sure feel right and open my self in the lines of my paper. It is a good feeling after writing and knowing that I was honest."*

The idea in this passage of opening oneself "in the lines of my paper" reflects the concept of writing being a place. The perception of writing as place may indicate the physical sense of stepping out of daily life when one writes, the distanced perspective.

Again, each time I read this, I think of the struggles Elito went through during this semester, the struggles of a divorce and custody of children, the struggles of dealing with the courts in a foreign country, the struggles of working long hours. Writing was a retreat.

Since his first experiences in school, Elito has had a feeling for reading, for its potential to provide experiences beyond the reality of his daily world. Elito's feelings about reading show that he values the imagination, this opportunity to experience beyond the present moment. Just as he uses writing to recall the past, Elito uses reading to know more than one experiences in their immediate situtation. Elito explains how reading and writing contribute to a different quality of experience.

> *After reading a book which will let you experience childhood stories, love or any other kind, there are many times when you tend to socialize the book experiences with your own, or makes our minds (or maybe imagine things that we could do like the ones in the book). We'll start to think and act like if we were in the book that we reading. Sometimes we would just say "I wish I could be there or part of the story, It will be real nice to do that." Many other expressions that go through our minds when we like a book.*

This writing illustrates how Elito uses reading to expand his sense of the possibilities/the opportunities in life. We may take for granted the effect of reading on our lives, the exposure to the wide range of choices that are opened to us. Awareness of this effect, conscious or unconscious, is a part of the motivation to read. The following passage illustrates an immediacy, an intimacy with life that reading can communicate, creating a greater sense of others and self. He wrote,

> *On the other hand reading is a way of experiencing things that are hard to do in real life. By reading we know more than just a place or a person*

> *feelings. We get to know life (on a way that I probably did not think that life could be).*

Here Elito describes how reading extends experience, providing a greater spectrum of life. In the following journal entry, he discusses the intimacy that writing can create between people.

> *With writing we express mostly the feeling that we could never say to anyone. Writing give me a peace of mind, makes me love more who people are and of course who I'm.*

This passage conveys a strong sense of the effect of reading and writing, the effect of connecting people and a realization of self through these connections. Elito articulates the potential of reading and writing to expand the dimensions of individual experience. Such a detailed and positive description of a student's feelings about reading and writing are not as typical as one might expect. Sadly, I am aware how many students lack such positive experiences and associations with writing.

Sally
Another student who finds reading and writing activities create more intense life experiences

I am interested in each students' perceptions of the meaningfulness of reading/writing because this connection is so critical to motivation. How do students perceive the effect of reading and writing on the quality of their lives? Like Elito, Sally is a highly motivated student because she has discovered some purpose in reading and writing for herself. Sally's journal contains interesting comments in terms of her sensing that reading and writing enable a "more intense" experience of life. She wrote,

> *Talking to a person is a wonderful way of learning about another but reading and writing about another is much more intense. The intensity of using my imagination of how I see the person's experiences. Experiences of another person can be a great deal to one with similarities of that person. I know that I have learned a great deal about myself through a few person's experiences.*

The above passage was written during the time that Sally was working on her second paper, writing about Isabella's experiences. She notes the difference between hearing a student's story in class and reading a student's story. In discussing the textbook, again she seems to appreciate the human experience shared through writing. She wrote the following about the essays:

> *This book [the text] offers me an understanding about other people's experiences with life as a child or as an adult... When I read any one of these essays I become aware of the people in society. I also learn from each essay. I learn how to organize my thoughts on paper, express my life experiences, and to accept myself for who I am. The people who write these essays they seem so proud of who they are and what has*

> *happened in their lives, so I have become proud of my experiences as well.*

A part of entering and participating in a community is believing that one's experiences and ideas have value in that community. Some adult educators have noted that college students (undergraduate and graduate) do not consider personal experiences worthy of analysis and reflection, giving authority to texts and teachers. This prejudice inhibits the integration of knowledge, a process of synthesizing that merges experience and information gained through reading.

I am interested in Sally's idea that writers value their experiences, and writing thus validates individuals' stories. This valuing of the personal seems critical to many of the students in my classes; respect for individuals' experiences assumes or implies respect for students' experiences. Sally's final comments on her writing for the semester included an interesting comment on her sense of the community created among readers and writers. She wrote, *"I want to be able to make a difference in someone's life just as some writers have made a difference in mine. Becoming a better writer is very important to me."* This feeling that she wants to give back some of what she had received from reading indicates a process of connecting/giving back to the community.

Isabella
A writer who continues to see writing as therapeutic

Isabella's experience with writing is more personal, more cathartic than others in the class. She was outspoken about family abuse and her past problems with drugs and alcohol. She was outspoken about her dislike of reading and her use of writing as therapy. Her honesty and directness affected the class, as noted by their journal comments. They were at times impatient with her outspoken ways. I am not as sure how the class affected Isabella. As I shift from looking at the journals of Elito and Sally to the journals of Isabella, I am struck by the variety of human experiences with reading and writing. For Isabella, reading and writing are a battleground where childhood fears and present day goals battle it out. Particular journal assignments bring out attitudes and feelings in different ways. The journal assignment that asked students to describe the voices they heard in their head when they wrote brought out Isabella's conflicting feelings about the process. Isabella wrote the following:

> *If I sit with the voice in my head they can sure stop me from writing. There is the child that hears her father telling her she is no good and can't do anything write [again, this same spelling error]. She also hears her brothers telling her she is ugle and stupid and will never go anywhere. I have found this new voice in my head that tells me I can do anything I want to do. I can hear the two of these voice fighting with each other almost all the time when I write. I hurtful ones are slowly getting weaker, yet they still seem to win alot. I tired of you coming in here and not letting me get things done go away.*
>
> *I'm stronger then you so just let me win. She is never going to get her work done. She has not a clue of what to do.*
>
> *I'm really sorry but she is going to get the paper done and she will get an A on her paper. She is not going to listen to you today.*
>
> *And we have a winner. The work gets done and Isabella turns in a great paper.*
>
> *I'm learning to hear good and work on the bad. I'm trying to make the bad easier to deal with. I want to learn how to chase the bad voices away.*

Isabella wrote in her final comments about what she had learned about writing in a free-form way. She discusses grammar and specificity in the same sentence. The following are her comments.

> *I have learned that I have to be very specific about my writing. This semester has taught me about staying in the right verb tense and how important it is for*

> *me to write about what is going on in detail. I have also figured out that if I can take good criticizm I can get even better with my writing.*

Along with her more specific comments on skills and attitude, Isabella described the "mental behaviors" necessary for her to work. She wrote,

> *"I can see how my own head can get in the way of my writing. So I just have to chase all the Voices, Noise inside and out away so that I can just sit and concentrate on what needs to be done here and NOW."*

There is a difference in a comment such as this, which describes the behaviors involved in working with writing, and comments that describe the expectations. Students need to understand how to get from expectations to behaviors.

For Isabella, picking up the pen can be a struggle, a struggle she is both drawn to and repelled by. Isabella wrote in her first paper about writing as catharsis, as a way of dealing with the pain left from childhood experiences. In her journal she further described the struggle:

> *I would say that alot of it has to do with the block I have with wanting to be able to put what I am feeling down on paper. Yet when I do get into the writing I can sure really get it going. The pen can be my friend only when I let it. There are lots of time when I fight the pen not just fight it. I just keep the pain deep in my soul and not let go. I have to let my pain go so that I can grow in my sobriety and grow in my life.*

Isabella here describes writing as a person, a friend, a person who can help her grow. The metaphorical language she uses to describe the process indicates her relationship to the activity at this time. Isabella referred often in class and in her journal to the role of writing in her "sobriety" program, explaining perhaps where her strong connection to writing in a therapeutic sense first developed. Writing is one of the activities used in 12-step programs of recovery. Individuals write about their experiences using alcohol or drugs. However, we need to remember here that the idea of writing as therapy was a theme that developed in the course of the semester. It seemed to surface with the second paper and with Sally and Isabella's experiences.

Isabella perceives writing as a process of experiencing rage as well as healing. For the assignment that asked students to compare writing to something Isabella wrote the following:

> *Writing is like…a storm as you watch the cloud come full of dark and gray colors in the sky that was once blue. I can see how my writing can be in a fit of rage. It comes strong and mean dark as dark as the pen will write yet as the storm it soon will subside and the sky will soon be calm again as in my writing when the storm is gone my letters seems so soft and clear. The darkness is gone and the way things flow just like that white soft cloud that is traveling through the sky. The rainbow that comes after it is all gone is beauty like my writing when I'm done I see the beauty of it all.*

For Isabella, writing is a storm, a dramatic place of struggle. As a teacher, I value how each student relates to the process of writing in a manner that meets his/her individual needs. Whereas one student may use writing to connect to others, another may use writing to struggle with personal history. In Isabella's written comments at the end of the semester, she wrote of the strength she gained from writing. Personal growth, spelling, and vocabulary all seem to be in the same category. Isabella wrote the following in one of her final journals:

> *By just telling me to pick up the pen and write by telling me what a good job I am doing and to keep up the good work. The writing is teaching me to be strong in what I'm doing. Strong with my words. Strong from the heart and to take the criticism with a grain of salt. The writing is also teaching me to spell better and to really work hard on my vocabulary.*

I am interested how in this passage writing for Isabella again is a person, the actor in the sentence. Writing is her friend; writing is her teacher. Isabella in this passage continues to work at understanding the role of criticism in learning. Her childhood experiences had made her sensitive to comments about her work.

Carmela

A student whose writing is motivated by her career goals

Carmela was probably the most motivated, consistently hard-working student in the class. She did not have the love of writing Elito had or the struggle with it Isabella had. Her motivation was driven in part by her desire to be a nurse. In her letter to the editor of the book, she referred to the value of readings in terms of how these readings would help her understand the communities she wanted to work with as a nurse. She wrote the following:

> *Reading about how people deal with medical problems physically and mentally, is beneficial to someone like me studying the medical field. I have come across situations where medical personal tend to forget that they ar dealing with human beings who have feelings, and reading about people's reactions reminds us to be considerate of feelings.*

Carmela never seemed to doubt for a moment the meaningfulness of reading and writing. She never questioned the value of any learning activity. She worked extremely hard on her papers. However, Carmela's attitude toward learning had not come easily. Comparing histories and attitudes, I want to look at the journals of Carmela, who was not encouraged as a child to get an education. She writes in her journal in an entry about Rodriguez's essay "The Achievement of Desire":

> *Reading this essay reminds me of my own family situation with education. My family or parents never encouraged me to do well in school. School was viewed by my parents as if I did good fine if I didn't*

> *do well that was also fine. Education was not pushed in my family because I was a girl and it was not important. Because I was a girl I was expected to grow up and become a housewife.*

While Carmela presently takes full responsability for her learning, she was very analytical in her first paper about the effects of her parents' lack of interest in her education, cultural attitudes about speaking out and asking questions, and particular teaching practices that affected her. The following passage from a later journal entry illustrates Carmela's interpretation of early experiences in school. Her perspective is unique. Carmela likes the privacy of the imagination. She writes,

> *Sometimes we were asked to close our eyes and imagine what was going on in the story. Maybe because I was exposed to reading first, which was also presented in a fun manner, I like reading better than writing. Writing always seemed like more of a chore, rather than something fun and inventive. Reading always seemed like the one thing I could do or experience with my imagination and not have to share it with anyone else. This may seem kind of selfish, but I always thought of writing as, now I have writen it down on paper and what if what I have written offends someone. Your imagination is truly the one thing that you can say is all yours.*

Carmela's comments indicate that, as well as social factors, personal preferences for reading rather than writing may be involved. This preference for reading came up often in students writing about the two activities, a situation which is corroborated in Deborah Brandt's research (1994). She found that there generally was a preference for reading, and writing was not as encouraged or appreciated as an activity. Brandt suggests, "Writing, though far from absent in households, is less explicitly taught and publicly valued, largely because writing practices are embedded in mundane work and are more stratified generationally" (476). Perceptions of writing are more complex.

Carmela is particularly articulate about academic expectations, with an emphasis on form. Carmela writes the following about what she learned this semester:

> *The things that I have learned about writing this semester include: becoming aware of my focus on a subject. This class really encouraged focusing on each paragraph and describing in detail what the topic sentence meant. Then each topic sentence needed to tie in with the thesis statement in the first paragraph.... My essays for this semester make a lot more sense in terms of staying focused on the subject. Because of the focusing, I believe that my essays are also more organized in structure (which I was also encouraged to focus on).*

As an instructor, I find it so interesting to realize what a student hears and chooses to work on. Because Carmela had incredible detail in her writing, she worked on shaping and focusing her essays. Her perception of learning had an emphasis on focus and rather than exploration and development. Although this attention to form was important in improving her formal writing; this emphasis on form in her comments concerned me, made me uncomfortable. Because I like to think that I emphasize discovery and exploration, I am disappointed when a student does not articulate awareness of this aspect of their process. Carmela, however, in her journal articulated the effect of writing on her awareness, and her writing reflected some exploration and discovery. As a "good student," a student who paid close attention to structure and expectation, Carmela's concern was with traditional expectations of form. Carmela gave a description of her particular struggles with correctness in her journal entry describing the voices in her head. She wrote:

> *The different voices in my head trying to write about a subject tend to intrupt each other by wanting to just write as fast as they can without stopping, but being interrupted by gramatics and the voice wondering if that was done right. The process that I have to go through is to decide*

> *which voice gets to speak first so as not to be interrupted by the others. Usually the one that gets to go first is the nonstop writer, but not always. Sometimes the situation warrents the grammatically correct sentence voice first followed by the untrusting voice. These voices are much harder to deal with and end up taking me longer to finish a piece of writing, over the nonstop writing voice. The grammatically correct and untrusting voices are the ones I end up using on situations like midterms and finals. I don't know if this is appropriate, but I get nervous at the thought of what if I don't do it right?*

Carmela is aware of the different modes she can write from and a sense of how the situation determines her processes.

Another interesting piece of writing from this research is Carmela's journal entry that described the effects she observed related to writing about the class. Carmela's writing is revealing because it uses the process of writing to think; it moves through the process of her insight. She is discovering her ideas about the experience through the process of writing, so sentences often seem pulled from the preceding idea, creating an inductive piece of writing. Carmela wrote the following detailed, articulate journal:

> *Freewriting about the classroom has helped my writing because having to freewrite about observations and feeling about situations makes you aware of details. In other words, I believe that observation is the most powerful tool to become aware of in writing. Observation forces one to understand that there are words, as well as a story to everything one sees through their eyes. When having to observe a situation one can notice more details and view things in a different manner then if one just looks at something. At the same time, feelings are noticed along with observation. Feelings are the strongest sense of observation because they*

> *help you understand what you see. It is very difficult to observe a situation without noticing how it feels to you: therefore, having to write about observation and feelings about the class has made me realize that everyone can learn about the same situation, but they will all learn it in a different way because everyone will see the same situation differently. For example, some people may not like the subject being covered in English, and they will just write what they have to to get by for that subject. This attitude comes from how they feel about the subject. Other times, if they feel good about a subject then they will do a good job on a piece of writing. This what I have felt and observed and felt is going on in the classroom. However, the learning and writing follow the steps of observing and feeling. Sometimes telling people to write about what they see and or feel will make them realize that they have more to write about then what they thought. In this manner they are learning how to become more aware of their feelings and how to write them down on paper.*

In this description of process, we are moved from a discussion of observation to the intertwining of observation and feeling. After giving an example, the writer returns to the idea of learning and writing coming from observing and feeling. The final idea that writing pulls from people what they do not know that they know is quite insightful. Carmela has described very different experiences with writing, from the formulaic to the explorative.

Concluding Comments

When I first thought about this research, I imagined the students as co-researchers. However, in the writing of my proposal, I started to realize that "co-researchers" was not the term I wanted. These were not graduate students with perspectives on teaching and learning. They could not exactly be called co-researchers.

However, I did want information about their experiences. I strongly believe that we need more information about what students experience in our writing classes. I hesitated to interpret my students' experiences, to make judgments about their attitudes, their motivation. I wanted to see in writing what they experienced. Also, I wanted them to research their histories and reflect on their experiences and attitudes. I wanted them to write in part this text about our experience.

I wanted to have them describe their experiences class for two reasons: 1) to collect this information in order to understand others experiences better, and 2) to see how writing about their learning might affect their awareness of themselves as learners. And so I did. I pushed them to write about what they were experiencing at every opportunity I could. Then I realized that the time in these courses is so tightly scheduled that I could not have them write about their experiences as much as I had wanted them to. There was course work to cover, there were readings to discuss, writings to share, punctuation rules to practice. However, I collected a good amount of their writing about their histories, their family and community attitudes, and their behaviors around reading and writing.

Beyond the information collected, I am intrigued with how this process of writing about the past and the present affected students, how consciously aware were they of this process and its effect. The early discussion about writing on reading and writing had a ripple effect through the semester, as we have seen in the comments and ongoing themes that students referred to in journals and other writings. Adela continued to question attitudes and responsibilities around reading and writing. Mark used writing to work through fears, while Elito used writing to keep himself motivated. John continued to write about his motivation and attitude toward reading. As a group, the class continued to show involvement and support for each other. Was what was happening in class the result of my research's emphasis on writing/discussing? I never discussed with the class the research other than to say that I was gathering information about their experiences. These students have had little experience with the concept of research. I have observed, as noted in the second assignment, that students will tell teachers what they want to hear, so I purposely did not discuss my ideas about the possible effects of the research on/for the students. Admittedly, I talked very little about my research. I did not have time.

Although students did not write much about this process, a few specific comments indicate conscious awareness of the effect of research activities, the reading, writing, and discussing of literacy. Carmela's comments indicated her observations about the effect of writing about the class experience. Several students wrote about how writing about a subject changed their thinking. Lynne wrote how writing about her history with reading and writing not only on affected her thinking on the subject but also her attitude toward learning. Lynne's comments throughout the course emphasized the strong effect that this experience had had on her.

Lynne wrote the following:

> *...Now that I have released my fear of reading, I feel more confident in myself and my reading ability. I strongly feel that talking and writing about my own experiences has helped me understand the difficulties I had in school.*

Throughout the course, Lynne carried this awareness of how writing can encourage new thoughts and attitudes. Later in the semester, Lynne explained how writing about the meaning of the word "education" had changed her understanding of the word. In preparation for the letter to the editor of the book, I had asked students to write and share their definition of "education." Thinking about the meaning of this word had affected her understanding of the concept. She wrote the following in her letter to the editor:

> *I have always thought that getting an education was something a child had to do as he or she grew up. I never knew the true meaning of*

> *"education." I was never asked to define the word, so it never crossed my mind. As for myself, I thought of continuing my education for a better paying job.*
>
> *Now that I have learned what education means to me, I have a better attitude toward coming to school. Education isn't just for a better paying job, or because I was forced to go as a child. Education not only means learning values but also how experiences with it would shape my individuality.*

Exercises that compare definitions encourage awareness of the complexity of definition and individual processes of developing word meaning/word sense. Lynne is conscious of the classroom process, writing and discussion, as a method of working with ideas. I believe this awareness of the effect that writing and discussing have on thinking carries with it a deeper motivation. Students who have specific career goals like Carmela may be motivated, but students who come to school with general ideas about better jobs often lack motivation for the actual process of learning, the reality of reading and writing. The student cases presented in this section reflect the obstacles that get in the way of reading and writing as well as the varied purposes that motivate individuals to participate in these activities.

In these few instances students articulated the effect of using writing to focus on their learning. However, much of what occurred and its effects cannot be measured. Being able to write clearly about one's writing and one's process is not necessarily an indication of skill level. How students write about their learning does indicate reflection, self-awareness, and a process of working with their own histories and attitudes.

Eighteen students started this class. Two dropped the first month in the semester. Sixteen stayed in the class, and 13 passed the course. Typically our attrition rate is much higher. My belief is that the emphasis on discussion of reading and writing attitudes created a bond that held the group together in a unique way and motivated students. Using writing to reflect and work with past experiences and present attitudes enabled students to have choices, make changes in their lives, and reinforce their personal goals.

Writings about the Classroom

Background/Theory

In the first two sections of these data, we looked at student writing assignments in the context of the classroom, and in the third section, we looked at students' writings that referred to their perceptions of the reading and writing experience. In this section, I look at student writing that expresses their perception of the classroom. What were students experiencing in the classroom?

Throughout the semester studied, I collected informal and formal writings reflecting attitudes toward what was happening in this course. The students' letter to the editor of their book (Paper #5) provided specific comments on the text as well as comments on reading and classroom discussion. Informal classroom writings and journal entries provided description of what they were experiencing. In this particular class, a majority of comments on the course referred to classroom interaction. This collection of individuals seemed to react/interact more strongly with each other than with the text. Judging from the quantity and the nature of students' writing about the classroom, student spend considerable energy and attention observing individuals and interactions in this environment. My purpose in this section is to highlight the experiences that stood out in students' minds as meaningful, experiences students chose to describe. These descriptions contribute to my understanding of the classroom as a community and the way individuals react and participate when entering this community.

Some theory first provides a theoretical framework and raises questions about experience in the classroom. One theoretical area is discussion of "discourse communities" and the other is negotiation of identity in a community. These concerns provide insight on debates between expressionist and social constructivist schools of thinking about composition. What is the relationship between personal expression and social/community interaction?

The word "community" has generated much discussion and has varied meanings in the field of composition. Gregory Clark in Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation writes that "Our primary project in composition studies is to learn for ourselves and teach others how writing enables individuals to define and sustain their connections with community" (xvi). This quotation emphasizes the historical and democratic goals of reading and writing instruction, the concept that these skills enable greater participation in citizenship. However, when we start to define "community," to recognize the diversity of communities, and to appreciate the complexity of participating in community, this goal becomes complex.

In composition discussions, the idea of "discourse communities" asks us to understand the basic writing classroom as a place where students are being initiated into a new community, the community of "academic discourse," which is defined as "a group of people who use discourse according to agreed-upon rules to maintain a body of knowledge that will support their common efforts" (Clark 1990, 40). Much has been written to define the characteristics of this community and the cultural knowledge and attitudes that students need to participate in this community. Others (Elbow1995; Harris 1989; Kent 1991) have questioned the idea that academic writing can be described as a homogeneous discourse or academia as "a community."

We cannot use the term community to imply that there is just one community. Instead I see the classroom, each classroom, as a unique situation (a community of sorts) where students engage in interaction and develop communication skills. I believe that a purpose of basic writing instruction is to increase students' awareness of multiple communities and multiple discourses and to encourage the development of skills and attitudes that enable them to participate in different communities. Kenneth A. Bruffee (1993) describes his interpretation of this complex process when he writes, "Teachers have to be able to translate at the community boundaries between the academic or professional knowledge communities that they belong to and understand numbers of nonacademic, nonprofessional communities that their students belong to" (64). He continues this discussion by explaining that helping students move from one community to another involves understanding their communities and understanding how they may interfere with "language" and "knowledge" of a new community (74). His emphasis here is on the students' relationship to others, to what facilitates and what impedes participation. In each teaching/learning situation this interaction of the individual and the group is unique, a specific interplay of individuals. Generalization here can be dangerous; an understanding of the particular is critical.

Understanding the relationship between composition studies and community is critical. At the heart of rhetoric is an understanding of the relationship of author and audience. When writers consider their readers, they develop and explain concepts more fully and are also encouraged to consider the subject from different perspectives. Audience awareness can also affect the writer's sense of authority, causing him/her to question expression of generalizations or opinions. This interactive process alters the more static concept of individual authorship. Reading students' descriptions of their experiences provides us with insight into this process of interaction and influence. These writing also shows the linkages between personal expression and community dialogue.

Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy in "Community in the Expressivist Classroom: Juggling Liberal and Communitarian Visions" (1995) have researched classroom interaction, looking at "issues of community, in particular, the diverse forms of authority, reward, and structure which develop in a classroom that emphasizes self-discovery" (63). They found a central problem in community theory to be the relationship between "liberal emphasis on individual equality" and the "communitarian emphasis on coherence and shared values." This problem shows the limitations of both the expressionist theories and the social constructivist theories. They find through close observation the complexity of interaction which many theoretical discussions ignore, and they ask other researchers "to bridge the theory-practice gap by grounding their discussions of communal theory in classroom data" (80).

I see each class as an unusual opportunity for very different individuals to interact in a more intimate and more involved way. Both the diversity and the commonality of experience brought to this situation contribute to the potential growth of individuals/of writers. Classroom interaction encourages participants to express, question, and work with individual beliefs, cultural beliefs, and texts, recognizing at the same time multiple perspectives. This process is basic to writing instruction in its development of students' awareness of audience and development of writers' sense of authority. However, the challenge of this concept of community rests in an understanding of the dialectic created between the individual and the community. How do individuals perceive and react in these situations, and what can I do to create a supportive environment? Each individual brings a history of personal and cultural experiences to the classroom. The majority is always favored in these situations. Group dynamics challenges equality in democracy. The interaction that occurs is often not a smooth melding of ways or an automatic consensus of beliefs. How individuals perceive this collaborative process of creating community is central to the value they put on communication. How do students react to other individuals, to other ways of interpreting the world, to other ways of interpreting text? How do students perceive themselves in this situation? Who has authority?

This experience of expressing oneself in a new community, whether in discussion or through writing, deserves close attention because it contains insights that show the relationship between expressivist theories and social constructivist theories. How is expression shaped by the social context of the classroom? Descriptions of students' experiences with personal expression in the context of a writing class indicate that this experience of personal expression is rarely an isolated/individual process but one of interaction with community and reflects the complexity of social construction in creating knowledge/meaning.

We need to ask to what degree the personal can be separated from the social. Here I reference another researcher, Robert Brooke, whose book Writing and Sense of Self (1991) explores identity in the writing classroom. He approaches identity through an exploration of "how the self is formed in interaction with society, only accumulating meaning and value from such interaction" (12). Like Brooke, I think that one cannot separate the individual and the process of personal development from writing skills. Terms such as purpose, audience, and voice/authority are intricately woven in the writer's sense of self. This sense of self must be understood as it is described by students in the context of the classroom.

This section of data focuses on individual/community interaction in the classroom. As in the previous sections in this research, I attempt to use students descriptions, students' language, to illustrate their perceptions. This section begins with more general discussion of the value of classroom discussion and then moves to specific interactions and reactions, illustrating the complexity of feelings and thoughts that may be involved when one enters a new community.

First we will look at comments on classroom interaction and learning. Critical thinking and the generation of ideas are often triggered by class discussion. Second, we will look at reading in the classroom, seeing how student work with multiple interpretations of the text. Here an early theme in the class, the idea that an essay or story had a hidden meaning, is reflected in informal writing. Then two classroom situations will be described by different students. The first reflects how the classroom can have emotional as well as rational elements. The second is a student's description of her reaction to the diversity in the classroom, reflecting the negotiation of identity/the development of self that may occur in classroom communities where diverse groups come together.

Entering the Community: Classroom Interaction and Learning

I, with others, have questioned whether intellectual growth that is sometimes identified with reading and writing might be a result of the interaction around reading and writing as much as the specific processes of reading and writing. I am not attempting to answer that question; however, in collecting these writings from assignments, journals, and in-class writings, I could not help but notice the quantity of writing and students' strong feelings about the importance of classroom discussion. Discussion of the text, it seemed, left a stronger impression than the text. Connie wrote, *"I'm not really fond of reading the assigned work but the dynamics I experience in class usually changes my mind."* Students' writing was quite specific about what they gained from discussion. Some students wrote that they had trouble understanding a reading until they heard the discussion about it. Others valued the multiple interpretations that were shared in discussion. Still other students comment on how discussion helped them generate ideas.

In putting these comments together, I realized again the unique interaction of each class, each group of students. In the past my students have always written on evaluations that they benefited from class discussion; however, I notice that each class combines individuals in a way that makes the lessons experienced unique. This class too had its character, its themes.

I always use small-group work the first few weeks to create a comfortable, trusting climate and encourage bonding among the students. I believe people learn best when they are relaxed and comfortable with each other. Students speak more openly in pairs or small groups, so discussions begin in small groups, then ideas are brought back to the larger group. After a few classes, most students are actively participating.
A few weeks into the semester, Michael wrote, *"People are coming out of their shells. It's fun to see students discussing a question that's been brought up. It's amazing to me to hear their backgrounds and still here they are in English 109 trying to learn how to better themselves."* Here Michael is aware of the diversity of the group as well as their common goal. He enjoys the comfortable interaction. The majority of students participated in discussion. Kass, Susan, Adela, and Sharon were more quiet than the other students, but they appeared interested, and journal comments indicate their involvement.

The second week in February, when students were asked to write comments on the class, the majority focused on classroom discussion. I found it interesting that when students were asked to write "What I notice about the class..." they refer to classroom interaction. Do they associate the word "class" almost exclusively with the individuals and their interaction? It seems so judging by their responses. Virtually no responses were made that took into consideration other aspects of the "class": textbook, schedule, teacher, lecture.

Being comfortable in an environment is critical to individuals, especially the first weeks in the semester. Seven students of the 15 who commented wrote about the level of comfort in the classroom, most using the word "comfort." The following are some of the comments:

> *"I think this class is really open with their thoughts also. I think it makes the others feel as ease themselves. Because there are so many in the class that*

participate or sharing their ideas, others feel comfortable enough to share theirs....It is neat to see a class work well together." (Lisa)

"The class is comfortable I don't like to be pressured. When I'm presured I don't function to well." (Sharon)

"I think that the class is more comfortable with each other in terms of class discussions on the readings and such but thats my opinion." (Thomas)

I notice Thomas' comment *"but that's my opinion."* Students often add similar self-conscious statements about opinion. These comments reflect growing awareness of self and others in the process of developing a sense of personal authority. As predominant as the sense of comfort was, the awareness that learning was occurring through discussion was also central to students' experience.

"I may not take part in class but I learn alot by listening. It also helps me to unde

"I like this class also because everybody keeps an ongoing conversation and we lea

"The class has different opinions about different subjects, but everyone is able to talk about their differences and agree on certain things. I think this is due to the class being able to discuss their opinions freely." (Carmela)

"When the class speak up I can understand twice as much." (Angela)

"What I liked best of the class was the discussions. I learned a lot from other stude

Students wrote more extensively in their journals about their observations on classroom interaction. These entries sometimes show the specifics of how students perceive discussion. The quieter students wrote that they learned from watching and listening and that they benefited either way. As noted earlier when Angela was helped by the class with her second paper, students abilities are increased by working collaboratively with students whose skills are stronger.

Although she was quiet, Adela wrote the following about class discussion:

> *I like class discussion because…I like to hear what other people have to say . That's how I get my ideas I know I don't like talking but I like to listen to the discussions. It gets me involved and motivated. I also like to hear other people disagree with each other. I think it's fun. It also helps me to wake up when I'm about to fall asleep in class…I really like debates like that because everyone gets to put their own opinion and either everyone will or will not disagree. I see that almost everyone likes to participate in conversations. I for one have my days. I'll either participate or I won't. If I don't know what's going on I won't participate.*

While some students are more general about this way of learning, other students explain more precisely how they learn from others. Carmela's appreciation of people and how she learned from them was reflected in a journal entry on class discussion. She wrote the following:

> *I like class discussion because sometimes it alerts me to how much or how little I know about certain subjects…. I like to hear how other people view a subject in different manners. Sometimes people can view a subject in a way I would never even thought of. This in itself can be a learning experience.*

Carmela refers continually throughout her comments on class to the value of multiple perspectives. This awareness of different perspectives was a major concern for her. When we look at different description of classroom experience, I can see that individuals peceive unique lessons in the same situation. The lesson plan does not indicate what every student takes from the experience. Whereas Carmela related to the different opinions, Lynne referred often to the importance of honesty in discussion/writing. The early discussions around reading had a big impact on her experience of the classroom as a place where students discovered that they shared similar histories. Lynne wrote the following comments on the early classroom discussion of personal histories with reading and writing. She continued to refer to this experience in many of her writing throughout the course. In her journal she wrote,

> *The class shared their experiences with reading to one another. I found it difficult at first because I don't like to discuss my reading abilities with anyone. After hearing several other students' experiences that were similar to my own, I felt more comfortable talking about reading. It gave me the chance to understand why I didn't like to read. I thought I couldn't handle the humiliation from other students, so I would give up instead of trying harder. Now that I have released my fear of reading, I feel more confident in myself and my reading ability.*

Here the classroom interaction has been supportive because individuals shared experiences in a manner that broke down feelings of isolation. Recognizing that they have had many shared experiences developed trust and mutual support. A critical factor in this sharing was an unspoken agreement that they could be honest about what they had experienced. Developing a community that is both safe and allows for honest expression challenged everyone involved.

Stephen M. Fishman, in his article on John Dewey and composition (1993), emphasizes that Dewey's first principle of community building involves creating opportunities to identify with others and find commonalities. Gregory Clark (1991) also emphasizes the important function of communicating with others who share similar experiences for the purpose of coming to a common understanding of our circumstances. As other students' writing indicates, the classroom community provides opportunities to also work with difference. The complexity of these dynamics need exploration.

I believe that community dialogue triggers memories and brings ideas to the surface that may be latent in individuals. This process of reacting to others both with common and different experiences has a creative energy and generates thinking. Many students' responses indicated that they got ideas from discussion. Their responses are similar to Lucas's comments: *"Class discussion is also good to me because I get other ideas about whatever we talk about."*

Carmela wrote an extensive, detailed description of how she sees a discussion evolve in the classroom, this process of surfacing memories/ideas. She wrote:

> *The communication in this class is directed by each others attitudes or feelings about certain subjects. For instance, if two people have very strong opposite attitudes or feelings about a certain subject they seem to be the ones expressing their feelings while everyone else has little or no comments. I think that this is the situation with every subject that comes up. It is much easier to comment and express your feelings about something that you are familiar with or feel strongly about, rather than something that is unfamiliar or know very little about. Sometimes when class discussion start, I think that some people feel that they know nothing or very little about the subject. It seems that a lot of the class is very quiet when the discussion starts, until some people in the class start expressing their opinions. I think that a lot of class think that they don't know anything or enough about the subject until someone expresses their opinion and then they realize just how much they really do know about the subject. This triggering of memory is either agreeing or disagreeing with the comments already being stated.*

I agree with Carmela's careful observations of communication here. This research has shown already several instances where students' comments and writings triggered memories and brought out ideas and experiences other students had not realized they had. Angela's first paper helped John articulate his attitude about reading, and John's paper reminded Thomas of those "secret meanings" that students are supposed to find. The theme of "secret meanings" reminded Carmela of her high school experiences. The idea of writing as therapy triggered Connie's experiences with her ex-husband and continued to be a theme for Isabella and Marcos.

Reading in the Classroom Community: Working with Multiple Interpretations

Students wrote specific comments about the role of classroom interaction in the interpretive process of reading. Students in this class were developing confidence in their ability to read and to interpret, and the classroom is the environment where interaction around reading occurred. The activity of interpreting essays and stories provided experiences with a theme that had surfaced in the first weeks of the semester, the idea that Dorothy wrote, *"I noticed in class that the class participation helps me to learn more about subjects we discuss it helps me to hear what others think about an essay."* The way that students perceive this process sometimes indicated what facilitated learning.

I see the readings in this course as catalysts for working at understandings. Although I use the words "main idea(s) when discussing readings," my emphasis is on working with individual interpretations towards a more complete comprehension. I emphasize the plural "ideas." Therefore, we are all involved in negotiating the meaning of the text and articulating/refining individual perspectives on the subject. Gregory Clark (1990) uses the theories of Bakhtin to emphasize the indeterminate meaning of language. The emphasis here is on the dialogue around language. Clark writes, "In this dialogue all statements are exposed to the collaborative process of judgment, revision, and redefinition that enables people to construct beliefs and values they can genuinely share" (11). When we theorize about this process, we need to understand the particulars of how individuals participate in this process/this community. Kenneth Bruffe (1993) recognizes the attitudes involved when he writes, "to engage in constructive, reacculturation conversation, however, requires willingness to grant authority to peers, courage to accept the authority granted to one by peers, and skill in the craft of interdependence." (24). What understandings/perceptions of this process have students brought to this situation?

Students continued throughout the semester to work with the theme that had surfaced the first weeks of the semester, the theme that essays and stories had hidden meanings. In this particular class, an obstacle to the process of individual interpretations seemed to be the idea brought from past school experiences that there is one correct interpretation, and the teacher knows and expects that interpretation. This subject of interpretation first came up in class when I read John's Paper #1 with its reference to "hidden meanings"of the text. Many of the students agreed that they had had bad experiences in school when they felt pressured to interprete a reading in the specific way the teacher expected. Authority is a critical issue when students are developing confidence in their ability to interpret what they read through interaction with other students and the teacher, comparing and evaluating interpretations. The process involves defining and trusting their own ideas but also being open to the ideas of others. Ultimately it is often a synthesis. Because of the early discussions around interpretation in the classroom, some students in this class continued to be more aware and comment on interpretive processes. Some students were quite articulate in their journals when they described these activities in class.

Sally is particularly attached to the concept of a main idea and how her ideas about the main point are supported by other students. Writing about how a discussion helped her understand one of the essays the class read, Sally wrote,

> *I like class discussion because it is very insightful to listen and understand others' views along my own. I know that my ideas are my own and I can only go so far with them, so I like to know others' ideas. Listening to others can help me develop a new way of approaching something. I know that listening to people's main ideas of an essay such as Enough of Roads," helped me understand some of the essay, and I found the main idea through others' ideas along with my own...*

In another journal entry several pages later, she continues this discussion of how classroom communication works in her method for uncovering a main idea. She wrote,

> *I really appreciate the class discussions we have when it comes to an essay we as a class are trying to find the main idea of. I usually can understand an essay once we have class discussion. When each student speaks his/her opinion, I get a better outlook on what others get from the main idea which ties in with my opinion. Then we as a whole the class comes up with the main idea. There are times when I have figured out the main idea for myself, and I find out I was right when we have class discussion. Knowing that I have the support from my classmates, and myself I find it easier to find the main idea of an essay.*

Sally clearly values consensus and support for her interpretation in these situations. She indicates by her emphasis on "the main idea" that she believes there is a correct interpretation. Like Sally's journal entries, Lynne's entries reflect concern with understanding the author but an equal concern with classmates' interpretations, both concensus and diversity. In her discussion of learning Lynne writes,

> *..The questions that arise during class discussion gives me a different perspective of what the essays in* The Engaging Reader *are about. The comments of the other students regarding the essays makes me think whether or not my opinion was similar to the idea that the author was*

trying to get across to her readers. ...[She then goes into detail about the class discussion of the essay "The Quality of Mercy Killing" written by Roger Roseblatt.] ...This was a touching essay for all of us. The thought of mercy killing for some students was extremely unjust. They feel that mercy killing is wrong, therefore a person should live until the Lord decides that person's time is up. Other students, including myself, feel there is no reason why a person should be in such pain....Of course, this is my own opinion.

Lynne is aware of student opinions that both ask her to question her ideas and those that support her ideas. The last sentence, like Thomas' earlier, reflects a self-consciousness about her authority.

While Sally and Lynne were focused on fixing their interpretations and having the other students share their perspective, Carmela emphasized being open to others' ideas. Carmela's writing throughout the course reflects a concern with the value of different ways of seeing the readings. Carmela had strong opinions about diverse interpretations of readings and the value of diverstiy. Carmela discussed in her journal the problems she had in high school when she felt she was supposed to interpret a reading in the specific way that the teacher expected. Discussing the class's ideas about reading, she wrote: *When people said that they did not like reading, it seemed to be for the reason of, not being able to intrepret stories in the same manner as their teachers. In my opinion reading literature should be interpreted as, what does this mean to me? And what is this author really trying to tell me? I do not feel that one story or essay will mean the same thing to everyone. Everyone should be allowed to express their own interpretations about literature. Writing is*

> *one way of interpreting literature. In high school I did not like writing, but I now see writing as part of reading.*

I find it interesting to look at one of the last entries Carmela did on reading and think about how privacy and individual interpretations continued to be a concern throughout the semester. She wrote,

> *The one thing that I learned in this class about reading that I found to be of great value is that it is all right for each individual to interpret their own meaning of an essay. Every individual will perceive and interpret meanings in different ways which is ok to do, on the other hand, each individual will generally come up with the same main point. This acceptance by the English instructor of individual intrepretations makes it easier to understand what an essay's meaning is all about. At the same time, this has also changed my attitude about reading essays or literature from not liking to read them to wanting to read them and figure out what their meanings are.*

Carmela is very articulate about issues of authority in interpreting readings. Interestingly, early classroom discussion around histories with reading and writing (the "secret meaning" John wrote about) surfaced this issue for the class, which continued to be a theme for a student like Carmela who felt strongly about the issue. Because she expected the teacher to have respect for multiple perspectives, she herself seemed particularly open to the different perspectives of other students and having respect for these interpretations.

Classroom Interaction: Emotional as Well as Rational

An episode in the classroom illustrates both the emotional nature of classroom discussion and the use of writing to resolve the emotional issues which surface in group work. Along with the positive critical thinking that happens with classroom interaction, there are the personality/cultural issues that reflect emotional as well as rational experience. The manner in which students relate to emotional discussion in the classroom may come from family and cultural habits. In understanding the learning situation, we can not ignore the emotional.

The following is a picture of one classroom discussion as it was described by several students. At the time I felt like I was wrestling with the emotional nature of the topic rather than the rhetorical issues; the class seemed unable to focus on the arguement of the reading, and this troubled me. What was I doing wrong? How could I help students focus on the logical arguments? The journals revealed even more about the way in which personalities had reacted to one another in this situation. The discussion was around the essay in the text "The Quality of Mercy Killing" by Roger Rosenblatt. The author discusses the dilemma of society and the law when a person has "killed for love"-a mercy killing-through the story of Roswell Gilbert. He is a 76-year-old retired electronics engineer who killed his wife, Emily, who had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis. The subject was both emotional and charged with controversy. Many students had not thought seriously about mercy killing before, but everyone had experiences connected to the suffering of disease and aging. Students had difficulty looking at the siutation from a social perspective rather than an individual emotional response. How does a society make laws and what are the problems of carrying them out? Sally talked about her elderly grandmother who had Alzheimer's disease. Connie shared her experiences as a nurse. Isabella told the story of her grandmother's death and cried openly in class. Many students later wrote about this class in their journal. The issue created emotion and confusion because students could not feel strong or clear about their opinions. They could feel both sides of the argument and had trouble coming to any resolution. For most students the topic was emotional, and for some it brought out a defensiveness around communication. Emotional topics are not only difficult for students but also for teachers. I have heard many teachers suggest avoiding topics that involve emotions and controversy because navigating through discussion is so difficult. However, if we see these courses as places where language is used by a community to dialogue social concerns that ultimately involve community decision making, we can not ignore these topics.

When individuals come up against complex issues in the classroom, their sense of self may be rattled, their authority not as clear. They are examining and reforming their experiences and values in a new context. Robert Brooke writes about the role of social experience in identity: "a theory of identity negotiations suggests that individuals come to experience themselves as one sort of person rather than another largely through involvement in the social situations which surround them" (1990,15). In this discussion students were being asked to see the situation in terms of social/legal issues. They were being asked to discuss the topic as decision-making citizens. Students were being challenged to take on a new role in the community.

The discussion around this essay triggered a wide range of reactions, bringing cultural values and personal histories into play with the ideas being expressed in class. Rather than focusing on the text, students seemed to react to each other and each other's behaviors. Both Elito and Mark seemed to distance themselves from discussion and were uncomfortable with their confusion. Elito did not speak in class, only shifted in his seat in an agitated manner. Later in his journal he expresses the emotion and the confusion about the subject. He seems to go back and forth between positions on the topic, finally ending his entry with the following:

> *If the reasons that I believe in were there, I would probably forgive the man. Never the less I feel that a person should live until the last second that it is possible. So I would say that I don't agree with mercy killing. eventhough in some cases I will agree with it. Forgive me for my mess, I know that this probably does not make any sense.*

Elito asks us to understand his confusion. Mark as he expressed the first day of class likes to have clear answers, no ambiguity. The confusion and difficulty that Mark has when he looks at ideas became clear in his journal writing. Having trouble distinguishing what the issue is, he leaps from the personal to the social and then back to the personal. He wrote the following:

> *I guess I'm narrow-minded. I've seen many people die, friends, lovers, and the peson walking done the street. I've been considered, by the doctors, that no hope was left for me, after being in a car accident. I saw*

> *the light and was told its not my time....If a person want to die its their choice*
>
> *With bumbling humans the only order to a degree we have is the law of the land (society), and God's law (religion), also every fanatic has his or her law who's to say which one is right, the majority.*

Mark's sense of the different roles involved is present, but his ability to articulate their connections or relationship is missing. Neither Mark nor Elito made references to the classroom discussion directly.

Other students reacted strongly to one another rather than to the logical points of the essay. This discussion raises questions about an individual's reaction to new roles, new ways of thinking. We have too often focused on the logic of the argument and ignored the complexity of personal growth affecting these situations. Mark said, "I hate these topics. There is no answer." Journal entries in this case document how personally the discussion was taken in a few cases. (Sally and Connie became somewhat defensive in this discussion, something I hadn't observed before.) Connie in this situation brought her experience as a nurse into the situation, presenting both sides of the issue. Sally seemed to feel threatened. The conflicting feelings that Sally felt can be seen in her journal entry on mercy killing.

> *Death should only take place when God decides the person's well being even throught person may be deathly ill. We as people do and should not have control of someone else's life, unless the person is a vegetable living off a machine. Then the family and doctor may know what's best.*

Sally has trouble with the contradictions and the critical questions in the issue: the conflict between what Sally knows should be done in a discussion and what she felt in this particular situation. However, the following journal entry reflects her focus on personalities rather than the logic of the issue. Her feelings about the discussion were strong as the following entry shows:

> *Class discussions are very trouble some at times. There are times when I really don't enjoy these discussions on essays because certain people try to force their opinions on me. I really value others' opinions, but I do not like people telling me that their opinion is right and everyone else is wrong. I feel that I am not heard or listened to because people do not want to hear the opposite of what they believe in because it may bother them. I like to find the truth within more then two opinions. When I listen to all of the different opinions of the students in class, I try to find the main idea of the essay. The opinions of others always help me distinguish what the author of an essay may be trying to get across. I don't try and*

> *tell people that I am right or wrong. I just want to be heard to help others.*

Although no names were mentioned, the tension was clearly between Sally and Connie. I had not noticed the tension to the degree that it was described in the journal. Connie also gave her interpretation of the situation in her journal,

> *One communication I had was with Sally a young girl in our class. She and I were discussing Alzeimers and the topic of "mercy killing." She stated that her grandmother has Alzeimers and that she is forgetful. She would never consider killing her grandmother. Sally's experience with Alzeimers is really limited because of her age (in my opinion). My experience is with far more advanced stages of Alzeimers...I felt uncomfortable talking with Sally because we both are against Euthanasi but I felt that Sally doesn't understand that I, too am against mercy killing.*

Note Connie's use of the word "young" and "limited experience" and Sally's perception that an attitude was being forced on her. Positioning is occurring. These women seem suddenly threatened by the difference in their thinking. Connie realizes that the problem may be communication. It is this personal reckoning with difference that is a critical aspect of community building. Fishman (1993), in his article about Dewey and the development of community in the composition classroom, writes that a principle of community formation involves occasions "for people to share their differences...ways of talking so that people can explore and utilize their idiosyncrasies" (320-321). While I have no doubts about the value of this interaction/process, we need more understanding of how to work with the emotions in these situations in productive ways.

However, resolving these lessons may not be entirely the responsability of the instructor. I have noted that individuals often seek to work out, to understand situations that are uncomfortable. Interestingly, both of these students chose at a later time in their journals to reflect on their behavior and attitudes in this particular situation. Connie returned to this experience several weeks later in her journal. She wrote,

> *I think there are some people in the class who are a little defensive and take on that position quickly with out first finding out what another point of view is. Maybe I am being a little defensive here but one day I found myself arguing with a girl in class about something (can't remember what now) but we were really saying the same thing but I got the impression that she thought I was taking an opposing position. I guess we weren't hearing what each other was saying.*

Journals provide a place for individuals to use language to think about past behavior and attitudes. Looking at the context of the semester, I can see in a journal sometimes how students continue to think about experiences or ideas and sometimes change their interpretation. For example, when asked to write about a classroom experience that stood out in her mind, Sally also returned to the subject, put personalities aside, and carefully described the process that she went through with this topic:

> *There was one class discussion that really stood out in my mind and that was the discussion of mercy killing. I had really never thought about my ideas and feeling of the concept of mercy killing until the class began expressing themselves on this topic. I began to feel that mercy killing would be a hard thing to do to a loved one. While the class was discussing, I began to think about my grandmother who is very ill. I thought to myself that God would take care of her and it isn't up to us humans to take another's life. but then the class began speaking about people only living because, they were hooked up to machines. I became confused about my feelings after we started talking about people only living because of technology. My mind was not made up after the class discussion was over. I took this discussion with me out of the classroom and I began to search for my opinion. I thought about it for days until I learned that people have the right to die only by God's hands unless technology is keeping them alive then the family should decide on the well being of their loved one. I learned a lot from this discussion and I will remember it always.*

Many students chose at different times to reflect on this same classroom experience. This topic was particularly controversial because it put the ideas of a text up against what many students had experienced personally, asking students to articulate values and reasons. Journals reveal how individually students experience a discussion. At the same time Sally and Connie were reacting to each other's ideas and personalities, Carmela was focusing on Isabella's expression of emotion in the situation. Carmela also described her own experience to the discussion of mercy killing as the most significant classroom experience:

> *A discussion of the essay "Mercy Killing' was being conducted and a member of the class had very strong feelings about the subject. Her reaction to this subject made me start thinking about how strong my own feelings were about this subject. I had never really given the subject much thought until this member of the class expressed her feelings about the subject. This made me realize that I was supressing my own feeling about loved ones that had to survived on life supports. I had to ask myself how did I really feel about watching my grandparents suffer by living on life suport systems. I then realized that I was very against watching them suffer in this mannner. I feel that it was their time to rest and be in peace, and it was up to us to let them do so.*

Carmela's perception of the class was quite different from Sally's and Connie's. Carmela was touched by the emotions of another student's story to see the topic differently. Carmela's use of the word "supressing" here to describe how she had dealt with the issue before is quite insightful. Expressing emotion like being honest about past experiences may be initiated by one student's behavior. Feelings are an important consideration in discussing the subject of mercy killing. Conscious awareness of the effect of/the role of feelings in argumentative rhetoric is critical learning. In her journal, Carmela goes further with her analysis of classroom communication into the experience and carefully describes what she had observed in the discussion that led to the insights described above. She wrote,

> *Thinking about the communication in this class leads me to believe that everyone (almost) in the class is comfortable discussing their personal opinions. Everyone seems to feel comfortable giving their opinion or point of view about an essay being discussed even if everyone's point of view is different. I believe that this is due to the way Janet teaches the class that everyone perceives a piece of literature in different ways. This*

enables everyone in the class to freely express their personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the essays we have to read for assignments. An example of people in the class expressing their reaction with openness; Isabella felt overwhelmed by the controversial essay "The Quality of Mercy Killing." I noticed that she was very quiet at the beginning of the discussion, but then quickly became uneasy with the topic being discussed. I believe that Isabella felt comfortable enough to be able to express her reaction to the topic and to let everyone know how she felt. [Isabella had cried openly.] We [Isabella and Carmela] have a psychology class together where we are taught to express our reactions

> *when we feel safe and or comfortable, and I believe that is how Isabella felt.*

Carmela's reference here to attitudes being learned in her psychology class illustrates this idea that she is entering a new community where the rules for communication may differ from those previously experienced in other communities. She is cautious in the way she describes what Isabella did. She writes that she "expressed her reaction" rather than writing that she cried openly. Whereas Isabella's open expression of emotion had at times annoyed students, her expression of emotion in this discussion acted as a catalyst, making students more aware of their emotions and the emotional aspects of the subject. Carmela explains/justifies expression of emotion in this situation by relating it to accepted behaviors in another academic course. The emotions connected to this topic were challenging. On the one hand, emotions and feelings engaged students and encouraged reflection. On the other hand, emotions obfuscated more logical issues. Emotions and logic were intertwined. I am intrigued with how these writings show the reflective process of students' thinking, their working through this encounter with behavior and communication in a new community. My final perspective on this discussion is from Sharon and illustrates yet another viewpoint on this discussion. Sharon wrote the following:

> *The class was discussing mercy killing. And one of the students began to cry over the death of her grandmother. As I watched the other students react to her crying, I saw that some felt uncomfortable and some showed there disapproval of her. I saw many just bow there heads maybe for respect of her feelings or maybe some not willing to deal with her pain. I am amazed about how those around you can influence you. I felt sad for her loss but I also though no way could I do this in front of strangers. I also watched how many of us just went quickly by her not even trying to*

> *comfort her. But as I watched only one person put her hand on her shoulder and asked her if she was alright?*
>
> *I to wished I could have comforted her by just a touch on her shoulder. Maybe just to say I see and feel your pain and also tell her that everything is going to be alright.*

How differently each individual perceives a situation. Sharon's journal entry is a reminder that family history and personality shape perception in unique ways. Because this was in Sharon's journal it was never shared in class. It is interesting to consider what might have been said if I had spent class time sharing and reflecting on the different perspectives of this particular class discussion on mercy killing. We might have been able to talk more about how Elito and Mark felt as well as other students who did not write detailed comments in their journals or the in-class questionnaire. These reflections on behavior and thinking gave me specific examples of the individual perceptions about this discussion in the classroom. These journal entries also illustrated how each individual seemed to focus and find a lesson to reflect on, not necessarily the idea in the textbook or the teacher's plan for the day. Carmela saw her suppression of feelings in the past. Sally gained a new perspective on the subject as well as awareness of her attitudes about discussion. Connie reflected on her reactions to another student. This collection of stories also illustrates how the different personalities play into the creation of experience: Isabella's expressiveness, Elito's silence, Connie's work experience, and Sharon's compassion. The more each perspective is shared the greater the potential experience for all.

These journal entries and informal writings show the emotional and interpersonal complexity of working with ideas, ideas that are emotionally charged. Students are thinking with their feelings and personal experiences; concepts and logic are not on the forefront. In class, I continually referred to the essay and a student rebuttal included in the text in order to work with the "ideas." However, the focus for the students who wrote about the discussion was largely on the interaction among students. Awareness of feelings and the part feelings play in discussion is clearly a part of working with critical thinking in some basic writing classes.

When asked to write about a classroom situation where someone affected their thinking or feeling, several students wrote about sympathetic feelings toward another student. What is the curriculum in a composition class? What are the boundaries of subject matter? In the following example Connie connects an informal discussion that occurred before class with the bonding of the group as a community with a common goal. Connie wrote the following response when asked to describe an observation of class:

> *I don't remember this specific class because to be honest, I'm writing this a week later. If I recall correctly one of our classmates is trying to locate her children who her ex husband has disappeared with. … What a horrible horrible thing to happen-not knowing where your children are.*
>
> *The class is a really close group now. We seem to use this as a kind of therapy session, I think. We all came together as strangers and now we have a common goal—to get through the semester—with as good grades as possible.*

In the next section, we will see how Connie felt both this strong sense of the group as a community and at the same time felt some degree of personal conflict in the situation.

Classroom Interaction: Personal Challenges in Situations of Diversity

Interaction among individuals often generates new ideas as well as strong personal reactions. I try in my classes to encourage reflective awareness of interpretation through the questions I ask students to write on. Hermeneutics in its reflective work with interpretation asks us to understand the many factors affecting our processes of creating meaning. Timothy Crusius in his book A Teacher's Introduction to

Philosophical Hermeneutics (1991) emphasizes the need to include the ideas of philosophical hermeneutics in our composition classes. He describes this as an ongoing attempt to understand our processes of interpretation, our unconscious ways as well as our conscious habits of interpreting the world. Understanding our prejudices is a part of understanding our interpretive processes. He writes, "Somehow. Truth first appears to us within horizons, as the coming-to-presence of meanings anticipated by our prejudices. But the hermeneutical task has only begun. The rest of the work is reflection, exposure of and inquiry into preunderstanding itself. Truth as unhiddenness allows us to see something amid the flux of happenings..."(34-35). The classroom is an environment that may foster this complex process of understanding the layers of influences on our perceptions of the world.

The last portion of this section provides some insight into the complexity of identity and participation in community. We've seen the building of community with its commonalities and differences, the concern students developed for each other. We have also seen that differences play a role in the personal and intellectual growth of individuals in the classroom. Diversity has been the focus of much discussion in recent years, the title of countless conferences, and the selling point of many books. Diversity is as old as history and obviously as complex. Community college classrooms are unique situations that do bring together a diverse group of people, people who might not typically sit together discussing social issues. Perhaps more than families or churches, schools bring together individuals with different values. The picture is not neat or tidy. How do individuals experience these situations, and how do these experiences affect individuals' writing? Most students do not discuss in detail their reactions to these classrooms, and it would be irresponsible to generalize. However, one student in this class was quite articulate about her reaction to the class and the ideas she was exposed to. I want to look closely at her reaction to this community, a community that was new to her.

In this section, I will look at Connie's reaction to the diversity she saw in the reading text and in the students in the classroom. Connie was one of two Anglos in this class, a nurse taking the course to improve her skills. She was a minority in this situation, although she identified with her historical position as a member of the dominant culture. She was the only student in this class to describe how conflicted she felt about the readings and perspectives presented in class. However, I have in recent semesters observed similar reactions to the text I am currently using, which has an emphasis on ethnic minority writers, minority experience. Although Connie valued the diversity around her, she also felt threatened by it. Connie explored many of her feelings and attitudes in her journal.

Connie was an anomaly in the class, a nurse taking the course because she was interested in writing. Her struggles came not from problems with basic skills but from an awareness of what different experiences other students brought to the classroom and a concern with where she and her ideas fit. Her identity and her values seemed challenged by the situation . Although a nurse who works with the public, Connie seemed shocked that everyone did not enjoy reading. Early in the semester, Connie made the following comments about other students in her journal:

> *"We are quite a variety of people from many walks of life in this class. We hav kids who are fresh out of high schoo to a near 50 year old man who recently got a GED...One girl, 19, were in my little group of 3 recently. She said something that astounded me. She said that she didn't know if she had ever read a novel. I couldn't believe that there are people in this USA that don't enjoy reading as I do...For so many, including this girl, English is a second language, but she doesn't read Spanish either, and doesn't speak it fluently. It seems to me that many of these children are hobbled from day 1—They aren't taught in their native tongue, they learn Spanglish- a slangy way of speaking at home and somehow get lost to the joys of reading. My heart goes out to these kids.*

Connie expresses a compassion but feels superior to others because of her educational background. Connie wrote the following about the classroom as community:.

> *I like class discussion because I like people—I have so much enjoyed peoples different backgrounds. Their reactions to things like reading and writing are so varied. I had only a vague idea about how other peoples lives differed from mine—only what I had read. Now I am exposed to people who come from different socioeconomic situations. I hope to use these different kinds of personalities and life experiences in some books later on in my writing...*

This last sentence makes me uncomfortable. Is it objectification of people? How is she really relating to the other students?

Connie's writing reflects a self-conscious awareness of her reactions to the readings as well as to fellow students. Connie wrote in her letter to the editor of the text, *"The Engaging Reader's collection of essays and articles are wonderful in that they expose people to situations and ideas that would never occur to them otherwise."* The essays in this reader reflect a range of lifestyles and socio-economic situations. Many of the authors describe with concern contemporary social conditions and problems related to economic and environmental factors. Connie here must weigh her experiences with others to determine how common these situations are. She wrote, *"The reasons that I like this text also are are the reasons that I do not like it. I like being exposed to other peoples experiences and opinions, but I found that there was an emphasis on cultures and ideas that do not match my philosophies well."* Understanding and working with different authors' perspectives is an essential aspect of critical thinking but not an easy one. Connie had noticed the perspectives represented in the book and felt isolated, not represented. Connie, in a classroom discussion on multicultural education, questioned multicultural education which she felt took away from the development of common values. She often referred in class to "common values" and emphasized that history supported "Christian European values." In the same discussion on multicultural education, Connie, who was educated in Canada, said, "In Canada, I had French rammed down my throat, and I couldn't stand it."

My beliefs about multicultural education and texts created some tension for me in this situation. I questioned how neutral or how opinionated to be, especially in a situation where Connie was out-numbered. I was quiet (neutral), having expressed my opinion through my choice of the text and classroom activities. While Connie had strong beliefs about the importance of "a common culture," she also was open to diversity in the class and wrote the following in her letter to the editor of the book:

> *I have been impressed with the selection of essays in this book. My class is a very diverse one in which there are students from all over this continent and some from Central and South America as well. We all have very different experiences with regards to education, and this text has fit in very well with our differences.*

Connie's letter reflects conflicted feelings, the kind of thinking that may occur when an individual is faced with new beliefs. In this situation, Connie was not just reading a new idea in a textbook. She was reading several essays that had "*an emphasis on cultures and ideas that do not match my philosophies well.*" Not only did the readings but also the diversity of the class made her question a set of values she considered dominant. I detect a conflict of emotion and reason in the following section of her letter to the editor:

> *I found myself feeling sorry for those characters in the essays that were brought up in the ghettos of Chicago, like in "There Are No Children Here,' by Alex Kotlowitz, but I do not think that this was the reason that Kotlowitz wrote the article. Empathy and sympathy are not the same thing, and I believe that Kotlowitz wanted to rouse the reader's perception of other ways of life in this country, not sympathy, and yet,*

> *his own behavior was sympathetic. I am sure that the mother of his story was not looking for pity.*

The conflict appears to be connected to looking at a social problem in new ways. How does she relate to those who have difficult lives? Does she ignore them, blame them, or does she have "sympathy"? Connie may lack the language to explain more completely the conflict she feels; the readings create a cognitive dissonance, agitate her beliefs. She describes a similar problem in the next paragraph:

> *The other article that I found my opinions torn about was "When a Citizen Fights Back," by J. Anthony Lukas. I was filled by admiration for his character, Colin Diver, who wanted to improve a dilapidated, violence-filled neighborhood by moving into it, and doing what he could to reduce the violence. I really wanted to applaud his courage in involving his family in such a project that could maim or kill them, and yet, I was angered by his arrogance, that he thought he could change the neighborhood by himself. Part of me wanted to move into the neighborhood with him, and part of me wanted to run as far away from that place as possible.*

Again, Connie honestly expressed her mixture of emotions around social problems and involvement. This confusion is in part a result of what she is experiences with individuals in the classroom. Articulating this mixture of ideas and emotions can be an important step in sorting through values. Her letter, as noted earlier, had several references to the role interaction with other students played in her working with the readings. In the final paragraph of the letter, she refers to the effect of struggling with different viewpoints. She wrote,

> *I have changed a great deal since I started reading these essays, and having been exposed to my diverse classmates. I believe that my having*

> *read these essays have made me a better person, ready to continue in my observations in life, which, by the way is no longer in that rut.*

This writing assignment, this letter to the editor, gave Connie a place to sort through some personal reactions, providing opportunities to work on the conflict of beliefs/values she felt. Writing to an outsider, Connie stepped away from the classroom and took a long look at the situation and her reactions to it. The social concerns described in the readings had been reinforced by the other students in the class. Her letter contains both the struggle of conflicting values and an awareness of the personal benefit of such struggle. Seeing a subject or topic in a new way is a part of developing critical thinking on the subject as well as awareness of one's own beliefs and prejudices. In her next papers as well as journals, Connie grapples with these issues of difference . Although she rarely was open about this in class, her journal has several entries devoted to exploring her feelings and attitudes. Connie's situation is interesting because she articulates carefully her experience of this encounter with a new community, with both text and the interpretation of text in the classroom.

Current theory on the social construction of meaning emphasizes that individuals work at constructing interpretation from separate experiences. We need to recognize the complexity of this process for individuals who are juggling community participation and individual identity. Kenneth Bruffe describes these situations when he writes, "Our goal is to distinguish our own distinct, individual point of view from other people's points of view and demonstrate individual authority" (1993,54). Bruffee's use of the word authority here is critical in terms of making the connection between these experiences and student writing. Encouraging honest expression and encouraging voice and authority in writing must take into account the writer's experiences in the classroom. How does entering a new and perhaps foreign community affect one's sense of identity, one's sense of authority, one's writing? And, how does an individual experience this activity when the students feels isolated, a minority in the situation?

Connie's journal provides specific comments related to this question. One journal assignment asked students to write how they felt about another teacher grading their midterm essay. The assignment is exchange-graded. In this journal entry, Connie, who did not typically seem to have fears connected to the class, wrote about what did worry her:

> *I really am frightened about someone who has never seen me, never spoken to me doesn't know me reading and grading my paper. I realize that if I am to try writing, someone is going to read my work and judge it but it still makes me anxious.*
>
> *The paper that I wrote for the midterm dealt with a rather controversial subject. I think that most of the essays in our text that we are reading have to do with living conditions and different people's worlds. The pictures that I am getting are not favorable. I find myself worried that our society is falling apart and I think about ways to solve the mess.*
>
> *What I am learning is that nothing is absolute and that there are many points of view out there. Will the reader of my essay be able to see my point of view? Will he/she be able to grade my paper objectively if he/she doesn't agree with my opinion. Will my grade suffer?*

The first sentence of this journal entry raises questions about Connie's sense of the connection between identity and writing. Connie's concern that the reader of her essay know her and also be able to grade the paper objectively is confusing. Connie's awareness of different interpretations/different perspectives is clear. For Connie, the struggle in this course was not with basic skills but with this encounter of a new community, an awareness of different experiences and perspectives. She seems no longer secure in her sense of "common values." Writing for someone who may not share one's values can be an intimidating experience, especially for a student. Connie's struggle with audience in this situation may have had to do with her seeing herself as a minority. Connie wrote comparatively a lot about the diversity in the class, differences among students, differences among author's opinions. I do not know whether she was more aware of difference than other students or more verbal about difference. This awareness affected her sense of authority. She was not sure whether her audience was sympathetic.

This journal entry also raises questions about the teacher as reader. Where did she assume I stood in terms of social issues? Did she feel comfortable because she knew me, regardless of what my position might be on the subject? We need to understand the role of values and personal identity and their effects on students' work with "audience," "honesty," "authority" and "voice."

Another journal entry also reflects how her position in this community may have affected her writing. This journal entry asked students "to describe the voices you hear in your head when you are writing." Connie wrote the following:

> *There is a voice in my head that I hear more and more these days "you are just as good as the next guy, your opinions matter just as much as the other guy's"*

> *The other principal voice is a gravelly self-depreciating "You don't want to offend anyone. Keep your opinions to yourself it really doesn't matter what you think."*
>
> *The problem of these voices is that its kind of a mental tug-of-war and the second voice usually winds up saying "The passage you just wrote is really dumb. No one is going to get what you're saying. Everyone who reads that is going to realize what a crazy person you are."*
>
> *The first voice usually loses the arguement. It can say "You're not so dumb, your opinion counts just as much as the other person's" til it's blue in the face but it usually loses the arguement and I delete whatever I just typed on my disk. It's gone forever and not even I can read what I wrote.*

This entry again shows the conflict created by not trusting her authority, not being sure of her audience, a problem of questioning her opinion, her voice. This case is interesting because Connie does not doubt her skills. Her fears are the result of an insecurity about the community for whom she is writing. She does not feel comfortable because she does not feel everyone shares her values.

This tension between the individual and the community, this work with both commonality and diversity, is a part of developing both individual identity and community. In this case, how a student experienced her identity/individualism in the situation strongly influenced her sense of authority in her writing. We have seen the importance of honest communication in creating community dialogue. We must also recognize the complexity of honesty when an individual does not believe that he/she shares values with the group.

Often a teacher does not know all that is going on within a person and does not fully appreciate what the classroom experience means to someone. Connie's final comments on what she gained from the class reveal something about her experience with writing in this context and also reflect the capacity of writing to move a person outside herself and into a broader understanding of community. Connie wrote,

> *I entered this course with feelings of insecurity that was the result of several years of emotional neglect (or abuse) by my husband and by me. I had only been separated from him for 3 months when I started this course and I felt scared and silly for having these inferiority feelings. Self confidence is not one of my strong points. This class has increased my feelings of self worth and restored some of the dreams that I had when I was a teenager.*
>
> *There were many other things besides the basics of the English language being taught in this class. Everyone here comes from a different place in life (and geographically as well) and I learned a great deal more about their experiences by their participation in class*

Connie also wrote in her journal toward the end of the semester,

> *I have finally grown up, I think. I like myself more now I think. I can buy stuff for me because right now I am the one who is worth it…A great help in this was my English class. The journal project was a great way to express myself.*

The journal for Connie was more than a way to express herself; it was a way to work with complex ideas and feelings. Her journal reflects a combination of the self-doubt created by the situation and the development of positive feelings.

Concluding Comments

In the first three sections of these data, I attempted to not only present students' writing but interpret their understanding of the assignment and/or of writing and its purposes. This section of the data is more explicit, containing students direct comments on the classroom and its effect on them. Students in this class reacted intensely to one another and grew both personally and intellectually from this participation in community. The data reflect the idea that from listening and reacting to each other students learn. The data also reflect the more complex nature of an individual's involvement in a classroom/a community. While many students write generally about the value of discussion, few express the complex emotions and reactions that Sally, Lynne, Carmela, and Connie did in their journals and informal writings.

When students write about how classroom interaction affects their reading, their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, they recognize in part how learning occurs and are aware of the community of learners. While many of these students did not react/interact with the readings in the beginning of the semester, they did respond to each other and the ideas expressed in class. They began with the first assignment to recognize the diversity of experience and interpretation of situations. This work with multiple perspectives carried into their work with the interpretations of a reading. Students responded to this diversity in very different ways. Whereas Lynne and Sally were concerned that others shared their interpretation and supported them, Carmela was continually emphasizing the importance of different interpretations. These differences may relate to congitive theories that look at the development of individual thinking. Along with this development of a student's own opinion amidst a crowd of opinions was the interference of emotional and personal issues, as described in the discussion of mercy killing. Family and cultural histories as well as personality are a part of human interaction.

The importance of these data is in their representation of students' awareness and processes. Teachers are aware to some degree that students have unique reactions and interpretations of what happens in the classroom. However, we may not always realize the ways in which these reactions may interfere with understanding the material and developing logical approaches to controversial subjects. The journal entries in this section of the data show how students may return to think about their own reaction in a situation and may reconsider this reaction. The use of writing to reflect on behavior provides insight into processes. Sally returns to the discussion about mercy killing and writes about her behavior. Connie uses writing to continually think about her reaction to others in the classroom. Perhaps this informal writing encourages reflection.

The reflective writings in this section do provide insight into what we call voice or authority. As students become aware of their readers, they are inspired as well as intimidated. Students describe how other students give them ideas. Connie describes her fears around another teacher grading her paper, someone whose beliefs and values she does not know. Whereas earlier data revealed the support classroom experiences gave Angela, the data here reveal the complexity of developing opinions/authority in open classrooms where very diverse populations may require students to see new and varied perspectives.

Understanding communication in these situations is critical to participation in a democracy. Students need to work with writing and speaking to peers as well as authority figures. They also benefit from using writing as a personal way of processing these experiences. Classroom interaction and awareness of its value are significant aspects of personal development and the development of community.

CHAPTER 5
Conclusion

This research started with the basic questions a teacher asks: What should be taught in this writing class and how should it be taught? As simple questions do, the more one explores them, the more complex they become. The purpose of my research has been to explore these questions as a teacher, one whose philosophical thinking is daily grounded in the classroom experience. I admit here my interest in the theoretical, especially linguistic and philosophical schools, those thinkers who enable me to work with written language as a mysterious human process, which can be used to support personal growth as well as achieve social goals. I also admit that I come to teaching with the hope that education is a means of working toward greater justice and equality. As individuals have access to information, develop interpretive skills, and strengthen their voices, democracy benefits. These theoretical concepts and philosophical ideals interact and create reactions with my daily experiences in the classroom.

As action research, the methodology of this study needs to be understood in the context of its effects on the researcher and the students as well as its contributions to the field. My interests in how individuals use writing for reflection and growth have directed my reading and been critical in the design of this research. In the class studied, students shared in the process because they repeatedly used writing to reflect on their experiences. The findings indicate the effects of these activities on their interpretations of reading and writing and on their attitudes about reading and writing. In creating this final project, the concentrated reflection involved in writing an interpretation produced a unique situation for me to explore a particular classroom experience. The insights and growth gained have strengthened my beliefs in writing and classroom interaction and my awareness of the complexity of these situations.

Although 87 percent of the students in this class were Hispanic, this research does not make generalizations about culture. The significant observations and insights that continually surfaced in the data focus on writing and patterns of human interaction: the use of varied modes of writing in a social context that played such a critical role in the experiences of these students. The purpose of this research is to create an interpretation of experience that will communicate to other teachers and researchers what happened in this classroom. The process of writing this interpretation has enabled me to bring into focus what has been in my peripheral vision. My data are not charted, although in places they are quantified. The picture which developed is a moving picture, that of a conversion. Its patterns of communication contribute to an understanding of language and learning and the way in which individuals play roles in each other's learning.

I represent here both the voices of these students and their echoes in my thinking. This research reflects how a process that encourages personal reflection and problem solving can enable us to use writing in a very immediate manner to interpret and re-interpret our life experiences, empowering us to move outside limitations we have experienced.

First, I will list the general observations of this research in relation to the initial questions I asked. Then I will discuss the outcomes in relationship to my theoretical framework.

Responses to Initial Research Questions

How Students Remember and Reflect on Histories with Reading and Writing

* Students' first papers were general and vague.

* After small group sharing in the classroom, students began to talk and write honestly about what they had experienced at home and school.

* Students described a wide range of family and school experiences with literacy, from the supportive to the destructive.

* Students expressed pleasure, anger, and frustration in their writing on this topic.

* In revised papers, students framed the experience for the reader.

* In revised papers, students were more specific, with details and reflection on experiences.

* Students began to reflect on their histories, ask questions, and attempt to solve problems with attitude and motivation.

* Students discovered shared experiences as well as diversity in the classroom.

* Students brought up important themes related to literacy: readings have hidden meanings and writing is a form of therapy.

What Students and the Teacher Experience in Writing Classes of Diverse Student Populations

Some students

* described being comfortable in the class and valuing the discussions.

* referred to the fact that other students had both common and very diverse experiences.

* described both fear and frustration with writing.

* described the stress created by expectations with correctness and style.

- discovered the use of informal writing for expressing emotions and solving problems.

- referred to the value of honesty in writing.

- described how writing about the learning experience increased their awareness of the classroom, their attitudes, and their learning.

- looked to other students to support their interpretations of the reading text.

- were intrigued with the different interpretations of the reading text that individuals brought to the class.

- commented on the collaborative process of working toward a shared interpretation of the reading text.

The teacher experienced

- the challenge of understanding students' diverse needs in the situation.

- the challenge of communicating expectations of professional/academic writing and also the use of writing for reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving.

How These Experiences Affect Individuals' Confidence

- Classroom interaction in some cases developed an individual student's confidence.

- The diversity of the classroom challenged one student's confidence.

- Several students reported developing confidence in the class.

How Student Writers Perceive Writing Processes, their Readers, and their Purposes

Students describe writing as

- correct form and style

- communication of ideas

- expression of emotions

- a different way of experiencing another person and life

- a form of therapy

* a form of healing

Students did not articulate explicitly their perceptions of readers or purpose; however, the teacher through reflection on classroom dialogue and multiple pieces of writing, interpreted the following purposes for writing in students' work:

* to express anger and frustration
* to remember experiences that bring pleasure
* to understand people whose experiences are different
* to understand people whose experiences are similar
* to work with motivation, attitude, and goal setting

Roles that Gender and Culture Played

* Female students were less confident in their descriptions of both past and present wr
* This research recognizes/describes individuals' interpretations of cultural/social experience

What Happened when a Teacher Encouraged Subjective Awareness and Problematizing of the Learning Experience by using Writing in a Social Context

* Some students described how, through discussion and writing, they began to understand the effects of their past experiences on present-day attitudes.
* Some students described becoming more aware of the classroom as a result of writing about experiences in the classroom.
* The teacher observed the use of writing in a social context to encourage recall, reflection, awareness, and problem solving.

This participant research merges theory and classroom experience through my interpretation. Theories have provided me useful ways of deconstructing the everyday. They have provided me with a language for evaluating writing, discussing the process of writing, and understanding the social context and the intellectual expectations of writing. However, the conversation between theory and classroom experience is a difficult one. Zebrowski, at the end of his book Thinking Through Theory, calls for teacher research, asking, "Where is the study that recreates the teacher's world?" (1994, 324). I sympathize with him, when he discusses the difficulty of speaking "the language of Theory" (333). My classroom reflects my work with theory, so it is difficult to separate the parts, the cause and the effect.

Another challenge in this study is that I work with different schools of theory and thus have slightly different angles on similar words/concepts. For example, the word "purpose" is a part of classroom discussion and core to theoretical discussions in composition. The transactional school of composition understands the negotiation of purpose in the creation of meaning. From another angle, the interactionist school or the socio-cognitivist school understands an individual's purpose as it grows out of past and present experiences. And then, feminist literary theory looks at purpose and asks that we move beyond traditional concepts of purpose and explore the purposes of voices that have not been articulated in academic structures. Thus, the strength of this interdisciplinary work is also its challenge. We are recognizing the dimensions of the vocabulary.

When theories are brought into the classroom, as a teacher/researcher I continually realize the need to explore the vocabulary. In this research the concepts of purpose and authority and the words "confidence" and "honesty" continually surfaced and resurfaced, asking for further definition. Here I will discuss shifts in my theoretical framework and focus on words that need to be better understood in the context of the classroom. These key words/concepts are purpose, authority/confidence, and writing.

This research provides both information and insights that contribute to working with the theoretical schools of composition: objectivist, subjectivist, and transactional/interactionist as well as more general theories of feminism and socio-cognitivism. Each of these schools of thinking has influenced my classroom work, and each was affected by the information collected and analyzed. As early as Plato, rhetoricians sought to explain their purposes. Was rhetoric to persuade or was it a means of seeking truth? A key interest of mine is the use of language to explore the meaning of experience. This research documented the wide range of purposes students used to direct their writing and the way authority influenced this process of developing meanings.

Purpose

The objective school sees the purpose of writing as presenting predetermined ideas, emphasizing the form of writing. This school of composition represents the goals of product, the final expectations of writing in many academic situations. Several of the students in this class had been schooled in this concept of writing with its emphasis on structure, and all of these students are participating in an academic situation that expects students to use traditional forms of academic writing. Whereas the Objectivist school recognizes form, it does not always recognize the embedded processes involved in producing these forms.

When writing is perceived as only a method of presenting predetermined ideas rather than also as a means of discovering ideas, students' writing may be limited. Close study of the writings done during the semester strengthened my concern with the sometimes stifling effect of an overemphasis on form. This insight is not new and corroborates other researchers work (Elbow, 1980;Yagelski, 1995). Students' comments serve as a reminder that words such as introduction, thesis, topic sentences, and conclusions can be a problem if emphasized in early stages of the process. These terms can also be misunderstood if they are not worked with as techniques of communication, but are only seen as academic forms.

An understanding of students' perceptions of the purpose of writing sheds light on the choices students make. Classroom discussion contributed to students' experience with writing as a way to speak honestly and to think critically about the subject. Students in writing courses need opportunities to use language in purposeful ways in order to develop a more meaningful way of experiencing writing, expanding their sense of the purpose of writing to include more than presenting predetermined ideas in structured forms.

In watching student work with writing, I have felt an affinity with the subjectivist theories of composition. I have sometimes been hesitant espousing them in the context of my teaching situation because I continually hear instructors complain about students who write anecdotally (bringing personal experience into an assignment), and I receive skeptical looks when instructors realize that I use autobiographical writing in this class. However, the detailed work of analyzing and rethinking these students' interactions and writings done in the process of this research strengthened my respect for the subjectivist perspective, especially in terms of what this perspective contributes to our vocabulary with its concepts of "environment" and "honesty" that are a critical part of communicating writing as a meaningful process. Macrorie and Elbow have focused on understanding the value of informal writing to discover "truths," to develop "voice." In this research, I recognize the environments that nurture writing as an intuitive, unconscious process which can be trusted to reflect and reveal insights.

However, the subjectivist school has been criticized for viewing writing as an individual process with isolated "authorship." My interpretation here must blend the picture, setting the subjectivists' focus on individual process in a context of interaction as discussed by those in the transactional/interactionist school. Both of these schools work with the use/purpose of writing to understand/to create meaning, and both schools work with understanding issues of authority. This research delineates the contributions of both perspectives and also their interrelatedness.

Looking at assignments in the context of classroom dialogue created a picture of writing as an ongoing conversation in a community of people. Students developed themes and affected each other's thinking about subjects. These conversations entered into the writing. Students' writing reflected classroom interaction, the feelings that were being shared and the ideas that were being discussed. Adela's, Connie's, Lisa's, and Carmela's journals showed a strong awareness of the classroom audience, although students at this point did not refer to these influences as "readers." This perspective on the role of audience to stimulate invention and to affect the growth and shape of thinking portrays writing as a living process with a communicative purpose rather than a collection of static forms. These classroom findings reflect on the value of both the subjectivist and transactional schools of thinking.

Understanding students' interpretations of the assignments, their purposes for writing, and the obstacles that prevented critical thinking and synthesizing provides valuable insight into the embedded processes of academic writing and thinking. Looking more specifically at the findings, one of the most apparent observations of the research is that students brought their own purposes to the writing task.

Personal writing provided an opportunity for students to use writing to express emotions and understand attitudes. While di Pardo emphasizes the development of narrative competence and its part in developing reflective thinking and increasing sensitivity to audience, she also writes, "The range of purpose for telling a story is as varied as the motives that underlie human behavior" (Narrative 13). Research interpreting students' expository narrative writing uncovered the many purposes that students brought to the situation when they wrote about their history with reading and writing. While purpose was not articulated in every case, the choices that writers made and the comments shared in journals provided an understanding of their purpose for writing this narrative assignment. Personal writing provided many students with an opportunity to experience writing as a problem-solving process where they gained new insights into old situations. In an environment that encourages the use of writing to explore subjects, students often gravitate to the use of writing for problem solving. (Vygotsky seems ever-present in my classroom.)

The second assignment asked students to move outside their experience and work with an analytical purpose. Along with the range of purposes students brought to the situation, I became very aware of conflicts that occurred when I as the teacher had a different understanding of the purpose of the assignment than students did. In rereading again and again the papers and my field notes, I developed a deeper appreciation for the complexity of communication that was occurring when students were working on this family/community research paper. Whereas I was encouraging exploration, analysis, and synthesis, many students were describing situations and were not analyzing or synthesizing in the way I had hoped. Working in depth with these papers gave me insights about what sometimes may keep students from moving beyond description when they are working with autobiographical material.

Whereas I wanted some kind of social analysis with this assignment, students had their own reasons for writing this assignment. While many students' understanding of the purpose for the second assignment was expanded and /or developed by social interactions in the class, a few students maintained a stance toward their subject that reflected strong individual purpose. Although these writings may not have met the teacher's expectations for analysis, they reflected a connection to the use of language for problem solving and indicated the complexity of individuals' purposes in this type of assignment.

Theoretically the research merges purposes that students brought to the classroom with those that developed through classroom interaction and the individual process of using writing to explore the experience. Researchers who have emphasized the use of writing for social analysis/criticism recognize the role that a particular heuristic plays in this process; however, they have not always recognized the history, culture, and individual purposes that students bring to the classroom. Both Freire's dialectic (1973) and Berlin's (1992)use of a political heuristic for critical thinking reflect forms of analytical thinking that may in some classrooms ignore students' interpretive purposes. A direct political/social critique approach to this topic of literacy might not have created space for the purposes that students used in this case to interpret their histories. While education moves individuals to an understanding of political and social perspectives, it needs to recognize also individual processes involved in these shifts. Whereas Adela voiced in her second paper the language of oppressor and oppressed, she chose in her journals and informal writings throughout the semester to work on her personal concern with responsibility and blame and to motivate herself. Her success in the class reflects a process of using writing to work with experience and move beyond past habits and behaviors. Her success reflects both individual and group process.

These findings represent many situations where students used writing to solve both past and current problems, because the assignments studied involved individuals in the use of writing as a tool for reflecting on past experiences. As Audre Lorde writes, "As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action" (1980, 126). Those who have criticized subjective/personal writing for being self-centered and self-indulgent have not looked at these writings in their social context.

A valuable aspect of teacher research is the time spent reflecting on papers and situations which enable the teacher to revisit a point of contention and make more explicit the factors affecting students' writing and the teacher's reaction. In writing this interpretation, I gained a greater awareness of the way in which individual purpose plays into the choices students make. In the future, I can appreciate the range of purposes students bring to a writing situation and also be more explicit about academic purposes. As instructors, we need to respect what students bring to the situation and encourage more explicit awareness of different approaches to analysis. Students need to understand situations for both personal and social analysis of situations.

Authority and Self-Confidence

Like "purpose," "authority" is a word that surfaces in different guises throughout these data. It is a term that describes the relationships of power that influence individuals' choices and their interactions. Authority issues are naturally embedded in any study of human interaction. Feminist writers such as Belenky (1986) have focused particular attention on authority issues in relation to gender, recognizing the experiences of women in academic institutions. These writers have recognized that concerns with authority and confidence are often connected to validating difference, different ways of knowing, different ways of expressing oneself. My focus is the challenge and the development of authority in a particular classroom.

This research provides some specific situations to look at and indicates that teachers and researchers need to use discussion and observationsto develop a better understanding of individual authority in community dialogue. Fishman and McCarthy (1996) are doing classroom research that looks at the these issues in terms of the philosophy of John Dewey and his ideas about community. They describe the complex situation of conversation in a diverse community. They recognize the problems created by oversimplification of these situations and refer to the limitations of both the expressivist and social constructivist's position. Human expression is both inhibited and developed through direct communication.

Other researchers have looked at problems that students have synthesizing information and integrating their own experience and knowledge into academic assignments. Researchers are looking at how student writers often lack a sense of the worth of their own experiences. Stuart Greene's (1995) article on problems of authorship in a beginning writing classroom describes case studies of writers struggling with authority, focusing on the conflict between the authority of text and the authority of experience. With similar concerns, the research presented here reflects the struggles with authority students had in writing just about their own experience, the struggle with honesty, problem solving, generalizing, and making concluding statements.

Much has been written about the authority of institutions and texts. The findings of this research represent issues of authority that arose when individuals wrote and participated in the community of a basic writing classroom. Students described their individual reactions and problems connected to the authority of social attitudes, the authority of text, and authority in a diverse community.

In the same way that students' purposes affected choices they made in their writing, students' feelings/attitudes about their own authority affected choices they made. Dominant social attitudes and values had an authority that prevented students from describing their negative experiences with reading and writing until the environment was made safe. Textbooks and teachers' interpretations of readings had an authority that had inhibited some students from trusting their reading of a text. Only through classroom interaction did some students begin to trust their own interpretations and understand this process. While in many cases a student's authority was inhibited by aspects of classroom authority, students' authority was also developed through classroom experience. How students are affected by authority and how students develop authority are important ways of viewing these situations.

The ideal of using writing for analytical thinking and problem solving must recognize the authority of social norms and the effects of authority on critical thinking. The ideal of authentic writing must recognize the complexity of individuals expressing new or nontraditional ideas in group situations. An individual's sense of authority can be fragile in a classroom/a community. Students' experiences and interpretations are shaped by social values and attitudes, those outside the classroom as well as those in the classroom. In these data, discussions about the reality of students' experiences with reading and writing involved breaking through old patterns of talk about reading and writing. Many students had struggled with social expectations and attitudes about reading and writing. Students had never participated in descriptions of school and home experiences about reading and writing that reflected negative experiences or attitudes.

In the case of literacy, social norms have prevented individuals from honest reflection and problem solving. Students may reflect on attitudes in classroom situations that provide students with the opportunity and the environment to write honest descriptions of experiences, feelings, and attitudes. These writings often lead to personal problem solving. Society has too often focused on attempting to convince students that they need reading and writing skills rather than enabling them to reflect on school and family experiences which may have started a chain of reactions that set up negative attitudes that prevented success in school.

Texts represent authority, and individuals' interpretations of texts represent authority. When John referred to never learning to "interpret or understand hidden messages in other authors' writing," he triggered a discussion on the authority of text in the early part of the semester that continued throughout the course. This struggle with the authority of text and the interpretation of text reflects important processes of working with multiple perspectives and intellectual development. Recognizing diverse opinions and attitudes, students were developing their own authority to make statements about what they read and to synthesize information. In this research, the open discussion about multiple interpretations that became a mini-theme contributed to students' awareness of the complexity of reading.

This research provided information that illustrated how issues of authority and confidence may be a critical part what has been considered the cognitive processes of making generalizations and writing conclusions. Close observation of writing in this context of the classroom provided many opportunities to analyze the choices students made and to understand factors affecting the development of an individual's sense of authority. Attitudes about family and self as well as attitudes about the purpose of the assignment played into how individuals asserted their interpretations. Whether a student decided to stay close to immediate experience or draw larger conclusions and make generalizations from experience was often determined by the student's sense of the audience and the student's confidence, reflecting the complex issues of developing authority in academic situations.

Authority appears to be a factor in making generalizations and drawing conclusions. The definition for "authority" here is complex. Writers must take a particular stance in order to draw conclusions from personal experience. The effects of the classroom community play into this process, again reflecting the collaborative nature of these activities. Angelica wrote her best paper, with a strong conclusion, when she had the class's emotional and social support. On the other hand, Thomas was baffled by his research, expressed frustration, and refused to draw conclusions. And there was Connie, who came into the class with some authority but became very intimidated by the exchange grading of her midterms because she did not know if the reader shared her "point of view." The authority of a standard (a majority) audience had dissolved. She wrote, *"What I am learning is that nothing is absolute and that there are many points of view out there. Will the reader of my essay be able to see my point of view?"* It is important to recognize when a student is expressing a critical philosophical concern. When we teach writing as a complex communication process rather than a predetermined form with a specific standard audience, authority is more challenging. This relationship of the writer to his/her audience is not a constant and is critical to the development of the writer's confidence, critical to the authority in one's voice. However, awareness of diversity within the community puts a twist on this situation, making it more challenging. Students in this class were experiencing multiple perspectives at the same time they were developing a sense of their authority in the classroom. In understanding the development of community, we must recognize issues of authority and diversity. Sally McConnell-Ginet, a feminist linguist, writes, "Language is the major means of linking individual selves and creating a culture that transcends our personal limitations by making use of all kinds of differences among users and uses of language"(1980, 164). An interactionist approach incorporates understanding of power and dominance and seeks to understand past and present social influences. Thus, concerns with authority and confidence cross disciplinary schools. As instructors/researchers, we will continue to study classroom situations that reveal the complexity and the excitement of individuals developing the authority to both recognize diversity and share what they have to say and write, synthesizing what they are learning.

Purpose and authority and the development of our vocabulary relating to these concerns must be appreciated in the context of academic skills as well as personal and community development. These personal writing topics gave students an opportunity to work with the following skills: observation, reflection, recognition of multiple perspectives, and development of authority in a situation where multiple perspectives are acknowledged. These skills are central to academic work. Also, the attitudes of critical thinking and problem solving that students experienced in this environment are critical to academic success. Understanding the experiences that both support and inhibit learning enables us to work on learning environments. This emphasis on the classroom interaction also humbles us as instructors. These findings indicate through the journal writings that so often what is learned was not in the teacher's lesson plan but in the environment created by the interaction of individuals.

The findings of this research gave me a surprise in terms of the strong role confidence plays in students' writing, especially in establishing their sense of authority. In my thinking, I had focused on students' sense of the meaningfulness of writing as central to students' motivation, which prevented me from recognizing the critical role of the more affective issue of confidence. This emphasis on meaningfulness, I think, was a result of a prejudice toward more intellectual interpretations of the situation. However, in the careful study of writings and field notes, I was struck by how frequently the word "confidence" appeared.

I was also surprised by both the quantitative and qualitative gender difference related to confidence when students wrote about school experiences with reading and writing. Male students wrote more confident interpretations of past school experiences than women when often the situations seemed similar. For example, Carmela and Thomas reacted in very different ways to their teachers' criticism. Elito and Mark described the challenges of a new language with the assurance of success while Sharon, Adela, Angelica, and Susan described nothing but struggle. Connie used the word "confidence" many times in discussing her concern with interpretations of the world and the validity of her ideas.

In students' final writings about what they gained from the class, the word "confidence" came up again and again. At first, I read over this, thinking "oh yes, confidence." However, with more thought, I have no doubt that confidence is a more critical factor in students' sense of their own authority than I had realized. I do not generalize from this one class, but I believe that issues of confidence in general and gender difference in terms of confidence deserve more attention and research.

Teachers and researchers see the relationship between confidence and writing and attempt to understand this relationship better. However, quantitative research on confidence (Pajares Johnson 1994;Wachholz and Etheridge 1996;Osgood Smith and Price 1996) provides an incomplete picture of this relationship. Wachholz and Etheridge's research suggests a correlation between confidence and effort and persistence in basic writing students. Pajares and Johnson produced results about confidence that were correlational, but no causation could be inferred. These studies provide a part of the picture. However, a look at the moving picture of the classroom provides insight into the roles students play in each other's learning and in the development of confidence and authority.

This research presents moments that enable us to appreciate confidence as a feeling that grows from challenging situations. The diversity of this classroom challenged students and created opportunities for students to recognize difference and develop a sense of authority, a voice. The process was slow and challenging, as documented in several journals.

WRITING

A major interest of mine is the way individuals perceive writing. Do we perceive writing as an exercise in following rules, or do we understand it as a process of recording/rendering, reflecting, problem solving, and exploring experience? When and how do these perceptions influence our process, the decisions we make? In this research, I focused on the moments where I saw something creative happening with language, where students used language to think in different ways. It is difficult to know how significant these moments were for students and with what perceptions of writing students left the class. I am not alone in my concern with how students perceive writing and whether new ideas and methods are affecting these perceptions. Writing classes are plagued by the conflict that is set up between correctness and form and the use of language to explore experience and ideas. Time and institutional expectations limit what instructors can do.

Teachers and researchers are working at methods of instruction that encourage students to be more aware of writing as a way of working with content. Yagelski's (1995) research on the effects of classroom context on revision strategies echoes this concern with how students perceive the writing process. He corroborated the finding of other studies that students tend to focus revisions on the surface features of the text, correctness and style. Yagelski looked at the specific features of the instructional context that might indicate why this continued to be the case. His conclusion is that "What seemed to matter most in this instance was not what the students were being taught about *how* to write but what they were being taught about what constitutes good writing" (121). Students have not experienced writing as it reflects qualities or depth of thinking; they have experienced it as form and correctness. The difficulty for teachers is in communicating the complexity of process: the goals of different stages in the process and the difference between goals of style and correctness and goals of generating, exploring, and synthesizing ideas.

Reading Yagelski's article, I remembered the first day of this class and the discussion my students had regarding what is "good writing." There were mixed opinions that day. Some students claimed writing was good if it allowed one to *"express deep thoughts and feelings in your own words"* or if it *"allowed you to get your ideas across to a wide variety of people"* while another wrote, *"Sentences should be written in correct form and punctuated correctly."* Teachers and students will always be caught juggling these goals and purposes. As teachers, we are beginning to understand "good writing" in terms of the many purposes of writing. "Good writing" is not only a good product, but "good writing" can also be a part of good process, a process of using writing to explore experience, problem solve, and discover ideas. We will continue to discover ways to communicate the complexity of these definitions. Exploring the potential of writing and asking what writing is encourages ongoing reflection and dialogue. Writers such as Macrorie and Elbow from the subjectivist school as well as feminist critics have asked that we use language to explore and discover, that we step outside traditional modes of structured writing. Journal assignments and informal writings throughout the semester encourage students to use writing in new ways. Feminist Rachel Balu DuPlessis writes of her journal, "it is not random, those connections. It is intention; I knew more, said more than I knew. The writing is in the interstices, the meaning is between. It is created in the relationship between, between the elements, they are put down at random, and they flare up; they are not said by chance; they know better"(1980, 137). These expressions of feelings and thoughts reflected students growing understanding of the varied purposes writing can serve. Many students' comments contributed to the conversation about writing as a form of healing. When asked to create a metaphor for the writing process, several students compared writing to therapy and healing. Students' intuitive insights reflect the nature of the writing process to work at meaning in its own way. Subjectivist and feminist theory encourages this creative work with the process. Audre Lorde writes, "as we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us"

(125). We need to recognize the power of writing in its intuitive and emotional aspects as well as its rational and structural forms. As instructors and researchers, it is important that we not overlook the value of the process of writing by seeing it only in terms of its academic and professional forms.

The purpose of this research reflects the use of writing as a process of personal and academic problem solving. Writing needs to be experienced as communication, interacting with self and others in order to understand multiple perspectives and to generate and communicate ideas. Organizational skills are empty if students have not understood the use of writing to reflect, analyze, and synthesize. The portion of this course that this interpretation focuses on involved the development of observational skills, inductive thinking (working with experience), and awareness of audience (classroom interaction), which encouraged reflection, invention, critical thinking, and problem solving. These skills with their emphasis on discovering "truths" are essential in the production of academic discourse, with its emphasis on the presentation of ideas.

The subjectivist school of composition puts an emphasis on the environment that births expression and insight and works at honesty. "Environment" and "honesty" are words in this research that provide tangible leads for teachers and researchers. This research describes moments when the classroom was a medium that encouraged students to honestly talk about their experiences with reading and writing and encouraged students to see their experiences with new insight. When individuals share stories, finding common themes and recognizing the diversity of experience, they are able to reflect on the family and cultural experiences that have shaped their feelings about themselves and affected their attitudes toward learning. This process enables both personal and community growth. This research indicates the obstacles as well as the moments of interaction that moved individuals to understand others and to reflect on their own perspectives.

Again, I must complement the theoretical schools that encourage subjective, explorative writing with the interactionist or socio-cognitivist schools that recognize the social context of these activities. Students' talk in pairs, small groups, and general classroom discussion was a major factor in students developing trust and honesty, generating important themes, supporting students' insights, and encouraging reflection and problem solving. This research highlights interaction which created an environment of trust and honesty. Can we separate cause and effect here? Did the writing create the environment or did the environment create the writing? Socio-cultural theory asks that we understand what students bring to the experience and what they understand. As Vera John-Steiner writes, "Socio-cultural theory provides nurture and challenge for the study of cognitive diversity in a pluralistic world" (1995, 10). Understanding the potential of writing, teacher/researchers need to look more closely at where and how students experience writing in varied ways. This research highlights classroom interactions in the semester where students experienced writing as a process that encouraged reflection, new perspectives, problem solving, and insight.

This research asks that we as well as our students explore our perceptions of writing in order to recognize that writing is not only transactional but transformative. As a catalyst, writing in the classroom may enable individuals to reflect and to change their understanding of past experience, their way of relating to each other, and their behaviors and attitudes. Because writing is reflective, individuals may use this process to see choices and make changes in their lives and in their institutional environments. Writing activates individuals and communities, encouraging reflection on experience, interpretation, and recognition of choices that transform us and the way we interact in our classrooms and our communities.

This research was designed in part to collect information about students' experiences and in part to put the process of reflection, analysis, and problem solving in the hands of the participants. The research project encouraged individuals to use writing for personal and intellectual growth as well as the building of community.

The questions of what and how do we teach needs to include a recognition of the potential of writing, an understanding of what individuals bring to the classroom, and continuation of conversations that work toward mutual purposes. It is my hope that this research will contribute to an understanding of the history and logic of student writing, the importance of working with varied purposes, the effects of authority on individuals, and the role of classroom interaction. This research was designed so that it can be replicated as research or as curriculum; it provides the instructor or instructor/researcher with ongoing information about students and their interpretations. This experience of writing one's history with literacy and discussing these experiences in the classroom gives students new opportunities for reflection and problem solving. As such it creates/involves personal and community growth through communication. It is my belief that writing should be taught as a tool for recording, reflecting, problem solving, and exploring experience—a creative process. Most important, the purpose of this research is to hear the voices of basic writers in the classroom and to continue the conversation about what writing is.

Directions for Further Research

Teacher research that creates a dialogue between theory and the classroom provides valuable reflection and insight on the teaching of writing and will continue. Interdisciplinary work is paraticularly valuable in order to appreciate the many diminsion of the situation.
This particular research has emphasized the role of human interaction in the development of expression, generation of ideas, understanding of communication. Teacher/research naturally leads into future studies that will look at the nature of electronic communication, conversations in new media.The electronic possibilities facilitate immediate and efficient yet very different kinds of communication.

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